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PUSHING BACK THE LIMITS: THE FANTASTIC AS TRANSGRESSION
IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S FICTION

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PUSHING BACK THE LIMITS: THE FANTASTIC AS TRANSGRESSION IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S FICTION

SUMMARY

Moving on from Jackson's belief in fantasy as the literature of subversion, this thesis argues that by filtering Todorov's concept of *the fantastic* through a contemporary theoretical understanding of transgression, the stasis which has resulted from the obsessive desire to pin down a single definition of literary fantasy can be transformed into a dynamic and interactive narrative process. This dynamism then provides a particularly useful strategy for the fictional exploration of the problematic positionality of women within patriarchal society.

The Introduction sets out and contextualises this theoretical framework, the particular significance of transgression to socio-political marginalisation being illustrated by reference to the work of post-Bakhtinian theorists such as Stallybrass and White. The importance of the precarious threshold positionality offered by the adoption of fantastic hesitancy on the part of the woman writer is also introduced.

The three main textual sections each focuses upon four novels by contemporary women writers, taking as their themes women and the domestic, women and nightmare and women who are "larger than life" respectively. In each case the intervention of the fantastic is seen to be inseparable from the problematic relationship between prohibition and transgression, a relationship largely set up and explored through a preoccupation with enclosure.

Throughout there is a presiding concern with the importance of paradox and ambivalence as a radical literary and political strategy. To this end the concluding section sets this thesis within a feminist fantasy framework, arguing that the problematic dynamism of the fantastic offers far more transformative possibilities than the "closed-system" of the feminist utopia.

The originality of this thesis resides in the fact that it adds two further dimensions to existing perspectives on the fantastic. By fully integrating the concept of transgression as a narrative positionality as well as a category of content, it aims to extricate fantasy criticism from the bounds of genre theory. In addition, by combining this with a variety of feminist theoretical perspectives and by taking as its focus contemporary women's fiction, this thesis provides something still not otherwise available: a full-length feminist reading of the application of the fantastic to contemporary women's fiction.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

The following abbreviations have been used to reference quotations from the primary texts under discussion in this thesis:-

BB - *Bag and Baggage*

BM - *The Birth Machine*

BMW - *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*

DD - *Dancing in the Dark*

FW - *Faces in the Water*

MB - *Memory Board*

NC - *Nights at the Circus*

QP - *A Question of Power*

RE - *The Roundness of Eggs*

SC - *Sexing the Cherry*

SD - *Sweet Death*

SO - *The Story of Omayya*

CHAPTER 1 - THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

Fantasy, Mimesis, and the Fantastic

There is a tendency, among fantasy critics as much as any other kind, to assume that the mimetic is the literary "norm" in regard to which fantasy fiction becomes a deviation, aberration or abomination, depending upon the point of view of the critic in question. But of course all fiction has an intrinsic relationship with fantasy, however apparently mimetic the form:-

It is [the writer's] primary choice of the imaginary that determines his [sic] vocation...A literary work is the materialization by means of marks on paper of the unreal world that can take on consistence and allow the transmission of experience only because it is the projection of reality in another dimension.¹

As W.R. Irwin also acknowledges, the apparently antithetical concepts of realism and fantasy fiction are closer than they may at first appear to be, because in the world of fantasy there is the "playful pretense" that the content is real, in precisely the same way as there is in mimetic fiction². To that extent a suspension of disbelief is required for both. Kathryn Hume's commonsense and inclusive approach to literary fantasy extends to her observation that fantasy is simply "an impulse as significant as the mimetic impulse, and...both are involved in the creation of most literature"³.

The primary texts under consideration here all operate as an exploration of the point at which realism and fantasy intersect. They are not, therefore, works of fantasy fiction in the sense in which the term is commonly understood. There are no futurist elements, no alien encounters, no magic wardrobes waiting to transport the characters into "Other" (or even other) worlds; and yet there are, at times, aspects of the various narratives that do self-consciously draw upon devices typical to such fantasy forms. All of these novels, for example, explore the notion of inner and outer worlds and alternative realities, drawing on a device parallel to that of science fiction without being science fiction. Some also employ the technique of metamorphosis and, in the penultimate chapter, gigantism (both stock features of fable and fairy-tale, again without being either). Finally the notion of dream narrative as a means to the exploration of the other side of reality is also to be found, but not in the manner presented in *Alice in Wonderland*⁴. The inclusion of elements such as these in and of themselves, no more make for a work of fantasy than the presence of metaphors transform mimesis into modernism⁵. What they do alert us to is the complex manner in which the *fantastic* emerges at the points at which realism and fantasy divide and merge.

Both Neil Cornwell and W.R. Irwin agree over the necessity in differentiating between fantasy and the fantastic, but take up apparently oppositional stances on the nature of the distinction. Neil Cornwell's approach, although the most painstaking, is surely the least helpful. In essence Cornwell differentiates between fantasy as "deriving predominantly from psychology, while the fantastic

is regarded as a basically literary construct..."⁶. In other words (at least according to him) the fantastic is the genre within which elements of fantasy may be found. To a certain degree this is a credible definition, but *only* to a certain degree. In the sense that a distinction is perceived to be required for literary purposes, the evolution of the term "fantastic" in this context has been a literary one, but it is surely not a generic one. Likewise one sees the credibility in attributing fantasy to the realms of psychology (or more particularly psychoanalysis), but *only* in so far as it is a psychoanalytic phenomenon. At the point at which fantasy intersects with literature in the form of a narrative device, it is no more a "psychological" phenomenon than the Gothic mansion is a matter for the architect. To that extent Irwin's notion of the distinction between the two still seems by far the most useful, even if it is a good deal less recent. According to Irwin, while fantasy may be defined primarily in literary terms as:-

...a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as a possibility...

the fantastic refers to elements within the fictional content (such as nightmares, daydreams and hallucinations) which could retain a material existence outside of all literary considerations and whose presence, in and of itself, would not necessarily classify a text as a fantasy narrative. Under the terms of this distinction fantasy becomes the noun/*langue*/genre from which the adjective/*parole*/element fantastic derives. The important point to consider for the purposes of this thesis, is that

this distinction enables the unassimilable nature of the fantastic narrative to take on a disruptive and disturbing quality fully in tune with the disruptive and disturbing events which frequently take place on the level of content; precisely because it problematises the fixity of limits between what is "real" and what is "unreal".

This has further implications for the interaction between text and reader. Most critics agree that a conventional work of fantasy functions via "an intellectually closed system"⁸. To that extent, although it may present the reader with a fictional world in which certain or even many of the conventions of empirical reality are challenged (perhaps irrevocably), it does so in a manner that prioritises internal coherence and allows for the consolationist possibilities of narrative closure which keep fantasy on a safely distanced level. Thus Kathleen Spencer, who argues that "...science-fiction writers...construct a text built on a unified non-mimetic world model...", goes on to quote Andrzej Zgorzelski's belief that the perceived aim of such writing lies, not in "making this world probable, but [in] making it *ordinary*..." (Spencer's emphasis). In contrast to this, the reader "must never be allowed to forget the strangeness of the fantastic..."⁹, a stance which can make it impossible for the reader either to come to terms with the unfamiliar events described, or to dismiss them as supernatural phenomena. It is this ability of the fantastic to outstrip the limits of its own narrative that makes it such a challenging literary phenomenon.

The very positionality of the fantastic contributes to this. Precisely because it comes to the fore at the point of interaction between fantasy and mimesis, the resulting narrative is always to a greater or lesser extent on the edge between the two worlds, simultaneously acknowledging both, simultaneously cutting across both; or, as Rosemary Jackson puts it: "The fantastic exists in the hinterland between 'real' and 'imaginary', shifting the relations between them through its indeterminacy"¹⁰. Cornwell quotes Christine Brooke-Rose as arguing that "The 'pure' fantastic is represented by the central line - a frontier between two adjacent realms" and then goes on to comment:-

That PF is represented merely by a line seems at first sight credible, particularly as Todorov suggests so few examples which actually fit such a category. However, it makes little sense to speak of PF as even a sub-genre unless we create a space in the model for it to occupy.¹¹

But once again Cornwell is "wide of the mark". His insistence that "it is still in relation to genre that the literary fantastic may be most profitably discussed"¹², leads him here into entirely unprofitable territory. Placing Brooke-Rose's observation back into the context of her argument, rather than trying to set aside the fantastic as a compartmentalised sub-genre by means of this notion, she is actually picking up on Tzvetan Todorov's belief in the fantastic as a characteristic inducing narrative uncertainty or, as he puts it "hesitation" in the reader's mind¹³. In this respect Brooke-Rose's statement is primarily a recognition of the fantastic as a precarious narrative strategy which inevitably challenges, not simply the limits

of the real, but the limits of conformity in the reader, through and beyond the text. Furthermore, that such writing has been linked with the vicarious fulfilment of prohibition, with "what is avoided in polite conversation" and with "low modality"¹⁴; all implies that whereas fantasy can undoubtedly be subversive, the fantastic is unavoidably transgressive.

The Textual Positionality of Transgression

Although Allon White is of course correct in his observation that "At its simplest transgression is the act of breaking the rules"¹⁵, Tony Tanner returns us to the etymological root of the term "transgression" in order to remind us that, rather than simply referring to a breaking of limits, this involves a "pass[ing] over or beyond" those limits which, like "passing on" in the form of death, necessitates an affirmation of the boundary being crossed in the very act of apparently denying it¹⁶. Increasingly one recognises that transgression is essentially a concept epitomised by a state of tension held in place by the confrontation of only apparently contradictory impulses. Precisely mirroring Brooke-Rose's location of the "pure fantastic", Michel Foucault sites transgression on:-

...that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage...it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses... [and] incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable.¹⁷

Foucault and Georges Bataille¹⁸, perhaps the most clearly acknowledged theorists of transgression, both tackle the subject primarily as a confrontational challenge to and encounter with societal taboos. In doing so they concentrate most closely, from a post-religious perspective, upon the two apparently contradictory and yet inseparable impulses of eroticism and death. Jackson, in alluding to the role played by transgression in fantasy fiction, largely constrains her reading to such an application of the term. Writing about the work of the Marquis de Sade, for example, she describes his particular preoccupation with these twin themes as "the most extreme articulations of a desire for transgression in our cultural history"¹⁹. But the relevance of transgression to the fantastic covers a great deal more than this. When Ann Morris observes:-

Man not only sublimates the fear of death in sexual fantasy, but in the midst of copulation he also augments his enjoyment by fantasizing about death. In these fantasies, he personifies death as both erotic and horrifying...²⁰

the significance of her statement lies in the recognition that it is primarily through the medium of the fantastic (in the above-mentioned sense of the precarious meeting-point where fantasy and reality *intersect*) that transgression takes place. At this point apparent antithesis is not synthesised, but forced into an uneasy alliance. Here, however, Jackson withdraws from the debate, appearing to dismiss the power of transgression in attributing it with a sense of obsolescence:-

...the activity is one which is self-consuming, attacking nothing but the human, for without God, transgression is empty, a kind of profanation without an object.²¹

But transgression is far from being an empty pursuit and far more than simply a category of content. The reading and writing process of fiction of all kinds can, in itself, be inherently transgressive. Tanner claims that the very origins of the novel form:-

...might almost be said to [render it] a transgressive mode, inasmuch as it seemed to break, or mix, or adulterate the existing genre-expectations of the time...

a process, in line with the definition of transgression offered above, necessarily involving an evolution out of pre-existing forms whilst appearing to refute them. But Tanner also endows the first protagonists with transgressive status, referring to them as:-

...socially displaced or unplaced figures - orphans, prostitutes, adventurers etc...[who form] a potentially disruptive or socially unstabilized energy that may threaten, directly or implicitly, the organization of society.²²

Once again of course, the figures he isolates here all, in being marginalised by society, take up their ex-centric positionality in relation to, rather than aside from its rules. But as he also acknowledges, "characters can never use language to escape from or transform their existence", and to that extent he looks to the writer to take on board a responsibility for effecting social and aesthetic transformation by means of writing as a transgressive practice²³. This would seem to be a stance also adopted by

anti-conventional feminist theoreticians such as Hélène Cixous, who argues that:-

Writing is in me the crossing, entry, exit, sojourn, of the other that I am and am not...that tears me, worries me, alters me...the unknown...²⁴

That Cixous associates the power of the creative word with the territory of the unknown in itself alerts us to the fantastic possibilities that reside within a great many fictional works. However, the articulation of this in terms of the borderline stance once again links the act of writing with a precarious positionality that is unsettling to conformist notions of fictional form. But if transgression is to be effective, then the reader must also be implicated, and from this perspective the secrecy and intimacy with which the reading of literature has historically been associated, can also attribute the participation of the reader with transgressive status, as is implied by feminist theorists such as Jane Miller and Nancy Armstrong, both of whom acknowledge the potentially seductive nature of this (at times) clandestine practice²⁵. Roland Barthes, of course, goes further still in attributing the very discourse of the text with the power to seduce:-

The text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*....Writing is: the science of the various *blisses* of language, its Kama Sutra...²⁶

Such a blurring and interweaving of apparently fixed relationships with the narrative process, surely reinforces the belief that in entering into any reader/text relationship one might therefore be argued to be entering

into a problematic and paradoxical contract entrenched in the very transgressiveness that threatens the fixity of its own limits²⁷. More precisely than this, however, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that transgression has a far more intrinsic relationship with the fantastic than theorists such as Jackson are prepared to concede.

For example, when Jackson claims that:-

Fantasies...frequently serve...to reconfirm institutional order by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of desire and neutralizing an urge towards transgression...²⁸

one assumes here that she can only be referring to consolationist, self-referential fantasies which she elsewhere refers to as being "more properly defined as faery, or romance literature". In any case it is most certainly not true of those fantastic narratives in which, in her own words "elements of fantasy enter into, disrupt and disturb the body of their texts"²⁹. The problem here seems primarily to stem from Jackson's failure to fully and thoroughly differentiate between the terms "fantasy" and "fantastic" in the manner addressed above. One of the reasons that the reading of a fantastic text must be seen in very different terms to that of a fantasy text is precisely because of the former's resistance to narrative closure. The reader of a fantastic narrative is projected into a precarious positionality that, far from "neutralizing an urge", must inevitably challenge the reader's sense of gratification in reassuring forms and force her to confront the ease with which apparently established limits of all kinds may be transgressed. This will inevitably have extra-

textual implications. As Irwin argues, although play is a central feature of any fantasy narrative, the reader's relationship with that narrative playfulness is merely a "contemplative" one similar to Roland Barthes' comfortable notion of readerly pleasure³⁰. The fantasist, however:-

...may really hope that his [sic] story will have some lasting effect of modifying the way in which his [sic] readers accept the norm that he [sic] has playfully violated...³¹

and for this to occur "play" must become an enticing but frustrating "foreplay" in which both text and reader are left "'open', dissatisfied, endlessly desiring"³².

The Fantastic Text as a Challenge to Patriarchal Conformity

This endlessly open and thus non-containable text must therefore pose as a dangerous threat to established notions of fixity and conformity, a characteristic that obviously makes the fantastic a particularly appealing form for the exploration of socio-political marginality and ex-centricity. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's excellent treatment of Bakhtinian concepts of transgression, focuses upon the carnival feature of the grotesque body as one which typically threatens the dominant order through an open-ended pleasure which denies all closure³³. Once again the fully disruptive potential of this is introduced through an awareness of an uneasy alliance of apparently contradictory drives:-

Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing "low" conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other.³⁴

In differentiating between stereotypical notions of low and high cultural forms, it is unnecessary to look too far before one recognises that non-mimetic forms are typically associated with the "low" and realism with the "high" points on the literary scale. Ann Swinfen, the title of whose study *In Defence of Fantasy* seems apologetic enough, opens her Introduction with the words:-

The modern fantasy novel might hardly seem to need a defence, were it not for the curiously ambivalent position it occupies in the contemporary literary scene...

and continues by saying:-

...some critics and academics condemn the whole genre with a passion which seems to have its roots in emotion rather than objective critical standards.³⁵

Just as the grotesque body of Bakhtin's carnivalesque impulse becomes transgressive at the point at which it impinges upon and threatens to overcome its boundaries with high culture, so the fantastic becomes transgressive in forming a similar threat in wavering dangerously along the boundaries between fantasy and mimesis. The gender dimensions of this issue are alluded to by means of a reference to Malise Ruthven's account of a confrontation between the oppositional forces of the women of Greenham Common and the USAF military personnel:-

On one occasion, some soldiers...in a military coach ritually bared their backsides to the women "in a gesture that had clearly been rehearsed with parade-ground precision"...[So many] themes...intersect here, where transgressions of gender [and] territorial boundaries...are transcoded into "the grotesque body"... The women live "on the wire", "on the perimeter", neither fully outside nor fully inside...³⁶

It is particularly important to notice here the means by which the women's socio-political marginality is highlighted through the physical structure of the perimeter fence, because the significance of enclosure to oppression and thus transgression will be given particular significance in the discussion of each of the twelve novels under consideration in this thesis.

The fictional adaptation of enclosure symbolism as a means of communicating the position of women under patriarchy is no new literary phenomenon. Nor, for that matter, is the use of the discourse of metaphorical enclosure as a means of communicating the manner in which fictional narratives can entrap women into sterile and passive roles. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar acknowledge, under the auspices of patriarchy the female protagonist is "...a creation 'penned' by man... 'penned up' or 'penned in'" to the text³⁷. But equally enclosure symbolism plays a key role in fantasy texts by male and female authors alike. *Alice in Wonderland*, for example, is an interesting case in point because of the manner in which Alice is penned into her text on both counts. A multiplicity of enclosures surround and constrain her. At times these take the form of external criteria (as when trapped inside the White Rabbit's house), while at others they are

inflicted upon her by the shifting dimensions of her own body. Finally, as when the Red Queen shrieks "off with her head", the text at times becomes a nightmare narrative in which Alice is constrained by the power of her own fears³⁸. Read as an exploration through fantasy of the maturation (sexual and otherwise) of the adolescent female, it seems entirely significant that Alice's quest is continually interrupted and obstructed by such volatile and unstable forces, her portrayal fluctuating violently between that of the powerless and diminutive *little* girl and the immense (and thus monstrous), all-powerful ogress/woman who must be captured and restrained. However unconsciously, Carroll has provided us here with a perfect example of the manner in which fantasy can function to articulate that tension between woman's desire to overcome limits and the patriarchal insistence upon a frustration and denial of such an impulse.

In line with this, the ensuing discussion of these fantastic narratives, all written by women writers, begins by unfolding the modern-day usage of precisely the type of enclosure symbolism that Gilbert and Gubar discover in their extensive study of women's writing in the nineteenth century. But the dimensions have shifted. Whereas the nineteenth century female protagonist remains fairly firmly locked up in her text (even Alice waking to find herself safely back where she started), the protagonists in these novels are all the more urgently looking to transgress (not just break, but pass over and beyond) the confines within which they are situated. However, the distinction must not be overplayed and, from this perspective, the important

issue lies in the use of the phrase "looking to" here. Just as Todorov's reader finds herself on a threshold of hesitancy between possible readings so, at the point at which we encounter them, the main protagonists of these texts, though pushing towards freedom, are still:-

...repressed and choked... [their] beautiful mouths stopped up with gags, pollen, and short breaths...³⁹

This is an important positionality. Both Allon White and Alison Light agree that a distinction must be retained between the notion of "progressiveness" and that of "transgressiveness". When White argues that the concerns of transgression lie with "the liminal position, the threshold which is forced..."⁴⁰, his unfortunate adoption of such an inappropriately phallocentric metaphor seems, at first glance, to render it a strange concept to apply to feminist textual approaches. But there is more to it than this. Although the progressive narrative may present a less compromised revolutionary stance, such apparent lack of complexity may actually result in the fictional content fulfilling its own desires in precisely the gratificatory manner noted by Jackson above. From this perspective it is the power of transgression, although more problematic, which is actually the more genuinely threatening. According to this principle, the transgressive impulse problematises straightforward boundaries and demands textual interrogation or, as Light argues, it depends upon the reader's determination to interact radically with a text and, in doing so, likewise problematises over-simplified preconceptions about genre, gender and narrative

conformity⁴¹. This means that our response to transgression may often be tentative, equivocal and perhaps even fearful. After all, as we have seen, it has inevitable consequences for our own positionality. Of necessity, therefore, as Susan Rubin Suleiman acknowledges in an article on Bataille's *Story of the Eye*:-

The characteristic feeling accompanying transgression is one of intense pleasure ...and of intense anguish...in any transgressive experience the limits of the self become unstable, "slipping".⁴²

Furthermore, that the confrontation with the prohibitive limit which prefigures the impact of the transgressive moment can be a dangerous and even a potentially self-destruction impulse, is made clear by Bataille himself, who notes that in:-

...bursting out of the chrysalis [man] feels that he is tearing himself, not tearing something outside that resists him.⁴³

But returning to Suleiman's comments, if the word "self" is substituted by Bakhtin's term "body" in this context, one recognises the albeit uncomfortable necessity of destabilising the limits imposed (from within and from without) of the collective body that comprises woman's position within a patriarchal society. Building upon the emergence of potentially liberating cracks and fissures, in breaking out of the constraints of: the domestic, the nightmare confines of the psyche and the conformist limits of the emaciated female anatomy, all of these protagonists aim to do just that, looking to transform transgression into

liberation not simply for themselves but also, by implication, for others. After all:-

...once a limited licence has been allowed, unlimited urges towards violence may break forth...it is harder to limit a disturbance already begun.⁴⁴

To this extent each of these novelists, caught in the act of pushing back the limits, follows Gilbert and Gubar's call (one appropriately structured through the discourse of the fantastic) for women writers to utilise the medium of textuality in order "to reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her climb out"⁴⁵ (my emphasis). Indeed in being poised on the brink, all three parties in the reader/text/writer relationship are likewise situated by these narratives upon that precarious meeting-point of possibilities where the fantastic transgresses the threatened and vulnerable threshold of mimetic conformity. Significantly this is a location mirrored by what Teresa de Lauretis considers to be that of current feminist theory and praxis:-

Consciousness, as a term of feminist thought, is poised on the divide that joins and distinguishes...subject and object, self and other, private and public, oppression and resistance, domination and agency, hegemony and marginality, sameness and difference, and so on.⁴⁶

To that extent not surprisingly, all of these novels explicitly and directly employ what might loosely be termed "a feminist worldview" in the treatment of their material, some going so far as to explicitly and directly interact with a variety of feminist theoretical discourses. In the ensuing discussion, no single voice of authority has been

allowed to dominate this theoretical multiplicity, a variety of feminist approaches being drawn upon to inform each of the textual readings. What all do share, however, is the recognition that their precarious positionality inevitably necessitates:-

...leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is "home"...for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other ...But the leaving is not a choice: one could not live there in the first place...⁴⁷

a departure literalised in the following chapter through an exploration of the manner in which the fantastic intervenes to challenge and disrupt woman's relationship with the domestic.

Notes and References :-

- 1) Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.445. First published *La Vieillesse* (Éditions Gallimard, 1970)
- 2) W.R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana: University Illinois Press, 1976), p.189
- 3) Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p.xii
- 4) Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, with the original engravings by John Tenniel (London: Dent, 1954) Throughout this thesis *Alice in Wonderland* is drawn upon as an archetypal example of a traditional fantasy text. On the whole it is utilised from this perspective as a "measuring-stick" against which to compare the workings of the fantastic. This is admittedly an oversimplified approach to Carroll's narrative but, as here, such comparison does help to set fantastic departures in context.
- 5) See David Lodge "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy" in *Modernism*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 481-496. In his essay Lodge takes up Roman Jakobson's claim that realist prose is "forwarded essentially by contiguity" (p.483) and thus tends towards metonymy (Roman Jakobson "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" in *Fundamentals of Language*, ed. by Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle (The Hague, 1956), 55-82). Following on from this standpoint, Lodge considers the extent to which, in relation to this, modernist prose might therefore be argued to be metaphoric in orientation.
- 6) Neil Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1990) pp.xi-xii
- 7) Irwin, op. cit., p.4
- 8) see *ibid*, p.190
- 9) Andrzej Zgorzelski, "Is Science Fiction a Genre of Fantastic Literature?", *Science Fiction Studies*, 19, 1979, 296-303 (p.299). Cited by Kathleen Spencer, "Naturalizing the Fantastic: Narrative Technique in the Novels of Charles Williams", *Extrapolation*, 28, 1, 1987, 62-74 (p.64). It is worth pointing out at this stage that in this article Spencer outlines the distinction to be drawn between Todorov's and Zgorzelski's respective definitions of the term "fantastic", choosing to adopt the latter in preference to the former in her discussion of Williams' novels.

- 10) Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.35
- 11) Cornwell op. cit., 136 discussing Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.64.
- 12) ibid, p.3
- 13) Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p.25.
- 14) By Jackson, op. cit., 70; Ann Morris, "The Dialectic of Sex and Death in Fantasy" in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. by Donald Palumbo, ([n.p.]: Greenwood Press, 1986), 74-84 (p.77); and John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.209
- 15) Allon White, "Pigs and Pierrots: Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction" *Raritan*, 1, 2, 1981, 51-70 (p.51)
- 16) Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.9
- 17) Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression", trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 29-52 (pp.33-4). First published "Hommage à Georges Bataille", *Critique*, 195-6, 1963, 751-770
- 18) Georges Batailles, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987). First published *L'erotisme* (Éditions de Minuit, 1957)
- 19) Jackson, op. cit., p.74
- 20) Morris, op. cit., p.77
- 21) Jackson, op. cit., p.79
- 22) Tanner, op. cit., p.3
- 23) ibid, p.99
- 24) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *La Jeune Née* (Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975), p.158. Cited by Pierre Salesne, "Hélène Cixous' Ou l'art de l'innocence: The Path to You" in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), pp.113-26, (p.124). Interestingly Betsy Wing's translation of *The Newly Born Woman* (Manchester: University Press, 1987) renders this statement "Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the

dwelling-place of the other...[etc.]" (pp.85-6, my emphasis). The distinction here, although providing an interesting reading in terms of woman's relationship with home and with her own anatomical "femaleness", loses the dynamism implied by Salesne's translation.

- 25) Jane Miller, *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture* (London: Virago, 1990) and Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) in which the author argues that "Until well into the eighteenth century the reading of fiction was considered tantamount to seduction..." (pp.17-18)
- 26) Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.6. First published *Le Plaisir du texte* (Éditions du Seuil, 1973)
- 27) The concepts of "contract" and "transgression" are generally considered antithetical, as is implied by the chosen sub-heading for Tanner's study op. cit. More explicitly, Tanner goes on to build upon this opposition in his book by means of setting up marriage as the apocryphal contract of which adultery is the fundamental transgression.
- 28) Jackson, op. cit., p.72
- 29) *ibid*, pp.9-10
- 30) Which Barthes considers to be provoked by "the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria", op. cit., p.14
- 31) Irwin, op. cit., p.183
- 32) An effect that Jackson herself considers the transgressive text to inspire in the reader, op. cit., p.9
- 33) Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986). So complete is this denial of closure, that the grotesque body itself is defined in terms of a multiplicity of gaping orifices rendering it "a mobile, split, multiple self...it is never closed off from either its social or ecosystemic context" (p.22).
- 34) *ibid*, pp.4-5
- 35) Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.1
- 36) Malise Ruthven, "Cassandras at Camp" *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 21, September 1984, 1048. Cited and discussed in Stallybrass and White, op. cit., p.24

- 37) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) p.13
- 38) In this respect of course these three types of enclosure suffered by Alice mirror the preoccupations set up in this thesis between: women and the domestic, women and nightmare and women who are "larger than life".
- 39) Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p.69. First published *La jeune née* (Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975)
- 40) White, op. cit., p.52
- 41) Alison Light, "'Returning to Manderley' - Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class", in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 140-145. Under the terms of this argument Light argues that while romantic fiction could hardly be considered a progressive fictional mode, the surreptitious extra-marital pleasures with which they provide women might well render them "transgressive...a forbidden pleasure..." (p.143). Again what is interesting about this statement is the fact that it is Light's attention to the meeting point between fantasy and reality here that leads to such fiction accruing fantastic properties.
- 42) Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Pornography, Transgression, and the Avant-Garde: Bataille's *Story of the Eye*" in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. by Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 117-136 (p.120)
- 43) Bataille, op. cit., p.39
- 44) *ibid*, p.65
- 45) Gilbert, and Gubar op. cit., p.16
- 46) Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness" *Feminist Studies*, 16, 1, 1990, 115-150 (p.115)
- 47) *ibid*, p.138

CHAPTER 2 - SHIFTING SPHERES: WOMEN AND THE DOMESTIC

"I hadn't realized how many shiftings there were."¹

Two modes of fiction, one primarily realist and one primarily fantastic, site the domestic at the centre of their narrative concerns. The first of these is epitomised by novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), a text in which most of the events of significance are framed by the house, the various journeys undertaken by the eponymous heroine mainly functioning to draw out the plot as far as possible before she inevitably returns to both house and its Master (ultimately for "good"). With its confessional epistolary style, its message of "rags to riches" upward mobility, its "happy resolution" whereby Pamela, through marriage, transforms her Master into her Lord and Master; such fiction acts as the precursor to the popular romance. It also shares with the latter its conformist social framework, if not its place within the fantasy spectrum.

The second type is epitomised by gothic fiction, in which the house once again forms the central site of action, the main protagonist being "a trembling heroine (who can't quite figure out the mansion's floor plan)"². Whereas the confessional domestic narrative retains our interest through setting up a variety of devices whereby our heroine negotiates her way around both house and Master of the house while retaining her virtue; the gothic narrative retains such interest through a chilling and mysterious suspense in

which we are concerned, not for her virtue but for her life. In both cases boundaries are set up (physical and social) by means of the reinforcement of domestic barriers such as partitions, doors and closets. As Mark S. Madoff comments: "The locked-room mystery is characteristic of the Gothic. It nearly is the Gothic"³. In the first case, however, it is the female protagonist who sets up these limits, only to have them broken down by the male protagonist. In the second it is the Master of the house that conceals secret passages, denies access, forbids knowledge, and the female protagonist who (oh so tentatively) dares to defy. Both fictional modes thus operate clearly as an exploration of the paradoxical relationship between prohibition and transgression, paradoxical because each, in denying the other acknowledges the other. Indeed Georges Bataille goes so far as to say that:-

*...transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it.*⁴

Nevertheless, in the first case the female protagonist is prohibitive (and thus conformist) and in the second the female protagonist is transgressive (and thus rebellious).

But it is a mistake to make too rigid a distinction between the traditional domestic novel as conformist and the gothic as subversive because the very paradox which allies, by denial, prohibition with transgression also allies conventionality with an acknowledgement of rebellion. As Kate Ferguson Ellis acknowledges:-

...I had intended to write about the literary use of the home as a place of security and concord, but found myself writing instead about the home as a place of danger and imprisonment.⁵

The four novels chosen for study in this chapter are: Judy Allen's *Bag and Baggage*, Joan Barfoot's *Dancing in the Dark*, Lisa Greenwood's *The Roundness of Eggs* and Jane Rule's *Memory Board*⁶. All four offer a feminist perspective on this issue which challenges and subverts the notion of domesticity as a "place of security and concord", but in doing so each acknowledges the paradoxical choices involved between liberation and protection. None of these texts falls conveniently within either of the two literary modes set out above. All, however, in reassessing the domestic, function to acknowledge, while working against, certain of the conventions of both.

As noted above, domesticity is commonly conceptualised in terms of limits and boundaries, and in all of these texts there is an obsession with borders and perimeters and their reinforcement and transgression. For theorists also, the establishment and acknowledgement of structures and boundaries seems the predominant feature of conceptualising the domestic. Ann Oakley, for example, refers to the housewife's position within the home as "...a circle of learnt deprivation and induced subjugation..."⁷, and quotes the Peckham Rye Women's Liberation Group who further qualify the housewife's routine as:-

...a compulsive circle like a pet mouse in its cage spinning round on its wheel, unable to get off.⁸

But in addition, in relation to the distinction between the primarily realist and primarily fantastic nature of the two modes noted above, it is interesting that all four of these texts site fantasy at the centre of the domestic scene. One of the issues to be explored is thus the extent to which such fantasy functions as conventional wish-fulfilment in the sense of the romantic dream to "set up home" and how far immersion into the fantastic in these novels operates as a challenge to that very dream. Although it is no longer true that:-

Unmarried middle-class women [are] considered a social problem...Stigmatized by terms like "redundant", "superfluous", and odd...⁹

strong pressures are still placed upon women to consider marriage their "natural goal". As Barfoot's protagonist Edna notes, her marriage to Harry was "...not only a miracle, but a conclusion" (p.73).

The Domestic Enclosure: Prohibitive Space?

The restriction of women within the domestic sphere has historically been perceived as a means by which transgression can be prevented. As Lucy Bland notes, at the turn of the century, should a woman consider the public sphere her natural territory, direct implications would ensue with regard to her reputation: "The term 'public woman' mean[ing] the same as the term 'street walker'"¹⁰. To that extent although superficially considered a haven of protection and security, one of the central questions raised by domesticity is the extent to which it:-

...tend[s] to reduce and confine the family
into a space that resemble[s] a prison...¹¹

The most explicit treatment of this theme is to be found in *Memory Board*, where we find the "wandering" Constance literally restrained within her home by means of internal locks fitted to all of the doors. But as Diana informs David:-

I suppose it sounds a terribly confining life, but it is one we've learned to live with a good deal of contentment. (MB,30)

One of the key words of this text is the adjective "sheltered", a term solely applied to female characters, and almost always by their male relatives. While apparently operating as an accusation aimed at these women of having a narrow perspective upon the world, this also reflects back upon the confinement imposed on women by men in the name of domestic bliss. Diana's brother David, in particular, is depicted as a confiner of women, albeit a benign one. Despite his pleasant demeanour, he perceives himself increasingly in the role of guide and protector to Constance and Diana, a role that becomes more and more patriarchal in orientation. One manifestation of this is his refusal to accept his sister's satisfaction with her lifestyle, considering it: "...too narrow a human world they had retreated into" (p.83), the disturbing aspect of this deriving from the fact that, despite his good intentions, this desire of his to "open them up" to a wider social circle is an extraordinarily penetrative one. Although it is Diana who first contemplates the necessity of fitting locks to the doors, it is the intervention of David and his

immediate family who not only carry this out but render it necessary in the first place, Constance retaining an instinctual awareness of the limits of her home territory until David begins to infiltrate their personal space. Discovering Constance to be missing, and waiting for news of her location, David's declarative statement:-

The minute we've heard...I'm going to go out
and get those locks for the doors, and then
I'll send Ben and Mike over to put them on.
(MB,98)

pays little heed to Diana's sad reply "I didn't want her to live in a prison" (p.98). Similarly, although it is his apparently liberating idea for the three of them to holiday together in Borrego Springs, he takes it upon himself, unasked, to reinforce domestic boundaries by checking the security of doors and windows in Constance and Diana's house before they leave. He is also quick to assert: "One hard thing...The doors are going to have to be locked there, too" (p.138). The use of the word "hard" in this context is of course significant. Although on one level connoting "difficult", it also implies that this statement is a "hard and fast rule" upon which David is not prepared to compromise. Like Harry in Barfoot's text, Constance values and clings to her freedom, recognising love and marriage to be "Such traps" (p.184), and extending this to her more general attitudes towards domestic space and personal confinement. Despite the philosophical disclaimer that "A lock is [merely] a psychological threshold"¹², when David comments "I've spent my life in a sound proof studio", and Constance replies with the seemingly dislocated utterance "Bomb shelter" (p.26), we recognise the similarity between

her past and present situations. Buried under rubble during a war-time air raid, this is not the first time Constance has had to confront the recognition that protection can lead to suffocation. Thus, although for Diana this incident is remembered in terms of birth scenes and liberation:-

The arthritic ache in her hands could make her think it was only yesterday that she had dug painfully...through the rubble to *deliver* this beloved woman... (MB,36 - my emphasis)

Constance's reiteration of the phrase "Bomb shelters" (p.167) as she is stranded at the airport while Diana and David mount the escalator, merely literalises her own "escalating difficulties" in the face of ever-increasing enclosure.

The desire to "get out" which Constance embraces but which intimidates Diana also, of course, implies a parallel exploration of their respective attitudes towards "coming out", which Mary Meigs considers a paradoxical combination for any lesbian of:-

...the euphoria of sisterhood [alongside] the gradual knowledge that she has been sealed in.¹³

From this perspective one cannot help but wonder if David's intervention in their household unwittingly locates Diana and Constance in precisely the precarious position faced by women of the nineteenth century, when it was considered:-

...imperative to regulate unruly sexuality...[through] the redomestication of apparently eroticised women.¹⁴

Constance's response to David is therefore incisive. Although Diana fears that Constance will perceive these measures as an "excuse to lock her up as Diana had always wanted to do" (p.102); and although she is devastated by Constance's observation that "my real prison is trusting you" (p.125); the latter consistently recognises her enclosure as a physical manifestation of male intervention in their lives. Thus she labels Ben and Mike "gaolers" (p.103) and explicitly projects David into the role of prison warder by asking Diana:-

We aren't always locked up in this house, are we?... Do you have the key?...Or does he?
(MB,112)

One of the most telling incidents emphasising the distinction between David's enclosing attitude and Diana's open and liberating one concerns his retrieval of Constance after she "wanders" off on the mountain path. Returning her to Diana and the car:-

She obeyed him meekly. Though it was awkward, he held her hand firmly all the way down. David saw Diana, sitting on the shady side of the car with all the windows and doors open.
(MB,192)

Although both David and Diana are distressed by Constance's disappearance, their respective attitudes towards the latter's freedom is belied by their movements. While David's body language is domineering, enclosing and insistent, Diana's posture is welcoming, all possible boundaries pushed back and denied. Unlike Simone de Beauvoir, who argues that for the elderly: "the possessor is his possessions' reason

for existence..."¹⁵ Diana has learnt the hard way that "the possessor is as trapped as the possessed" (p.132).

That David, on the other hand, perceives relationships almost entirely in terms of possession (and indeed possessions) is made clear on more than one occasion. Rather than pleasuring in one of Constance's fleeting moments of lucidity, David's response to its disappearance is couched in the language of ownership and aggression:-

How bright she could be and how quickly that brightness could fade! David wanted to snatch back the question that had discouraged her, snatch back the brightness. As soon trap the sunlight. (MB,182-3)

Furthermore, confused by Diana's distinction between marriage as reductive ownership and her own long-standing relationship with Constance:-

David wasn't sure what Diana had meant when she said Constance could not live in a cage, for she wasn't speaking just about locked doors, the fence that was even now going up around their house if Ben and Mike were on schedule. Those two women had lived together for over forty years, and that seemed to him no less a commitment than marriage...If all David had had to do to keep Patricia safe was build a fence around the property - bars at all the windows would have seemed a small price... (MB,195)

Despite increasing numbers of men constructing ever more enclosing limits and boundaries around these two women, David remains fixed in his monolithic attitude towards the imprisonment of women as protection. Incapable of perceiving their relationship on their terms, he insists on conceptualising it in his own, erroneously labelling a voluntary choice to share domestic space in terms of

confinement and contract. Ironically, however, where Constance and Diana share an intimacy that pleasures in proximity and treats desire as a gift, David remembers that "Marriage at its worst...had been a prison term of solitary confinement" (p.160) for him.

Enclosure sandwiches the retrospective narrative of *Dancing in the Dark*, the novel opening with the words "I bind my wounds with paper" (p.1) and concluding with Edna still imprisoned by domestic space, being ironically described as: "...the free woman in the narrow corridor, alone in a small white bed" (p.183). As readers we are never clear whether Edna is incarcerated in an ordinary or a prison hospital, the nature of the distinction being, however, irrelevant (after all, Constance is just as much a prisoner as Edna). What is relevant is the fact that any prisoner is in a strangely paradoxical situation with regard to reality. On the one hand the epitome of the "insider" (literal), she is quite obviously also the epitome of the "outsider" (metaphorical), longing to "break out", seeking refuge in fantasies of escape and, in the case of Constance and Allen's character Hilda, at times asserting herself through very real escape attempts:-

Since [s]he has no satisfactory role at home, the old [wo]man spends whole days roaming about, without telling [her] family: [s]he does not know what it is [s]he seeks, but [s]he gives [her]self an impression of seeking.¹⁶

But despite this, Constance and Edna are seen to mourn their imprisonment within unfamiliar surroundings, keenly missing the sense of belonging encapsulated by the term "home":-

I wonder what's happened to all my things? The house? Can it just be sold, without my ever seeing it again?...Is someone looking after it? If not, will the pipes freeze this winter, or the furnace break down? (DD,97)

As Edna recounts the details of her previous married life, it becomes clear that her sense of domestic enclosure has, like David's, always been perceived in terms of protection rather than restriction. Of all the characters in this chapter she is the one for whom Gaston Bachelard's words ring most true:-

...in the daydream [of the house] itself, the recollection of moments of confined, simple, shut-in space are experiences of heartwarming space, of a space that, would like above all still to be possessed.¹⁷

In any narrative dealing with institutionalisation, one of the issues central to the text is the relationship between "home" and "the Home", and the extent to which one can consider communal and thus depersonalised space as "heartwarming space". For Edna, although she dislikes the relative lack of cleanliness in the institution and withdraws into silence away from staff and patients alike, she clearly gains comfort from the fact that her new environment is, at least, a simulation of domestic territory. Thinking back to the attempts of the authorities to uncover her motives for murdering Harry, she considers:-

...they were dangerous...They wanted to put me outside, when I'd been so careful and worked so hard to get inside and stay there where I'd be safe. (DD,123)

For much of the narrative Edna's ultimate shield and protector is of course Harry himself, upon whom, as Head of

the Household, Edna projects all the positive and secure characteristics of domestic boundaries, the house simply functioning to endow this with a material "reality":-

...I wanted everything to be just right, and so ordered drapes and curtains... heavy material shielding rooms from watchers...a perfect womb. (DD,18)

Having absolute faith even prior to marriage in Harry's ability to protect her from "outside rules" and "outside accidents" (p.58), Edna's guilt at failing to take an active role in his life outside must be concealed even from him. Reconsidering her omission to confess to Harry her lack of engagement with his anecdotes from work, Edna realises: "That would have broken something. Everything, I suspect" (p.102). Instead Edna diffuses the potential for transgression by transforming his reports into consolationist fantasy form, safely rendering them:-

More like stories read in magazines or heard on radio [sic]. Not even as real as a television program. (DD,100)

As a consequence, although her romantic teenage dreams are undercut by suggestions that "one might find...that the life of a princess was confining" (p.38), Edna consistently believes her marriage to be a fairy-tale come true. Thus she accompanies her bridegroom across the threshold at the start and end of each working day, pleasurably acknowledging that "The two acts enclosed my own" (p.88). Her pre-marital prognosis that "the obligations and the demands...[of marriage] would fence my life" (p.62) has apparently been fulfilled, and all appears well.

Only with regard to sex does Edna conceptualise her role as encloser rather than enclosed, referring to her body as "a dark cubbyhole for him" (p.128) and desiring to "pull him entirely into my body, all safe and warm the two of us" (p.127). But Harry, resisting enclosure, warns Edna before their marriage "I'm scared of feeling trapped" (p.61). The desire to stake out territory, as far as Harry is concerned, refers to the desire to acquire power and stamp his mark upon the outer world. For Edna it refers to the ability to set up a safety-net between herself and that very same outer world. These differing perspectives on the domestic dream are reflected in the fact that Edna has "freedom from" the outside world in this text, while Harry has "freedom to" explore it, her freedom literally being bought by his financial superiority. As such when Edna, looking at the magazines that have shored up the structures and principles of her world, observes:-

I began to see small cracks...[the magazines] have begun to speak of ways to juggle job and home. They have quick recipes and easy ways of doing housework, instead of thorough ways. I thought, things are being swept apart here. And where would it end? I foresaw chaos, a breaking down... (DD,86)

she recognises that her safety-net is beginning to be removed. Unlike Diana, who welcomes the greater domestication she perceives in her grandnephews, Edna is aware that the perpetuation of the fairy-tale necessitates the maintenance of rigid demarcation points between genders and worlds. Thus, where Harry delights in a freedom which ultimately extends to a transgression of the constraints of marital fidelity, when Edna's position mirrors this after

his death, she sees it simply in terms of: "...chaos; a great black catastrophic pit in which anything could happen" (p.115).

Akin to Constance's precarious relationship with such boundaries, it is interesting that the closest we ever see Edna to bitterness is when she satirically refers to her former position as one of being: "Really safe, in my bomb shelter of a home" (p.84). Although the detonator is located outside of the apparently secure space of the domestic world, the house is the site, both of the explosion and the "fall-out" area of Edna's shattered world. But Harry's ability to detonate explosions has been clear all along, and ironically brings into focus Edna's decision to marry him :-

There was some great rock lodged in my chest...and all of a sudden it was breaking into splinters and pieces were flying loose... (DD,53)

Such cataclysmic eruptions remind us of the fragility of the barriers between inner and outer worlds for, as Madoff comments: "Somehow outside must contain inside while remaining different from inside"¹⁸. Despite Madoff's misleading phraseology here, the metonymic relationship inside has to outside can only ever threaten the existence of inside (never outside) as a separate entity. After all, as Kenneth W. Graham argues, prohibitions are always imposed from outside and transgressed from inside¹⁹ and, as Edna discovers, in cutting through barriers from within, one can only ever end up "without".

In *The Roundness of Eggs* limits are likewise set up only in order for them to be challenged. Even the newspaper headlines "blur from words to black marks and back to words again... (p.11) as Olive recognises that, although she is located in the inner sphere, the newspaper headlines firmly belong to the outer world. By traversing the lines between private and public, the limits of the newspaper's own lines begin to blur and shift. Such transgressions are frequent and, as here, at times manifest themselves in what are only seemingly minor ways. Speaking to her husband Jim, Olive asserts "We live in different worlds, you and I" (RE,109), a comment which refers as much to the fact that they inhabit entirely different planes of reality as it does to their positioning with regard to inner and outer worlds.

Nevertheless, while firm demarcations are apparently in place, both the reader and Jim find their positioning difficult to locate. Jim, already confused in this manner, assumes that his wife is "getting out of the house" (p.46) when in fact she is spending more and more time in the attic. But he is both right and wrong in his assumption. After all, Olive does consider the attic "separate in every sense" (p.45) to the rest of the house, and to that extent she is indeed "getting out" more. He is also both right and wrong when, in reaction to Olive first telling him that she wants the attic room for herself, he asks her if she is going to start sleeping up there (p.46). Rightly perceiving this action as a direct threat to the primacy of the marital bed, Jim's mistake is to assume that she will start sleeping there *instead of* with him. In fact, in true adulterous fashion, she begins to sleep there *as well as* with him.

But it is in *Bag and Baggage* that the boundary lines between inner and outer worlds are perceived as most clearly problematic; complete failure to maintain the domestic space as a separate enclosure untainted by outside intervention resulting in:-

Worlds...building on worlds...What [Hilda] thought of as her home was, after all, only a collection of different surfaces with different textures and temperatures....Some people might see this as an invasion but she felt they would have it the wrong way about. The truth of it was that the outer walls of the block of flats were enclosing space stolen from nature; these things, that drifted through and settled, were simply beginning to reclaim it. (BB,3-4)

Hilda's conceptualisation of her own flat as a mediating space between culture and nature finds its symbolic manifestation in the fungus that is naturally cultured on the bathroom wall and the fact that the cat, in moving between the inner and outer realms:-

...tread[s] tiny bits of the communal gardens into the carpet...[and] probably trod bits of carpet fluff into the grass when it went out again. (BB,4)

Leaving such barriers to break down of their own accord, Hilda seeks shelter either in the park, which she describes as being "a garden yet no one's garden", or the library, which she describes as being "full of homeless books, borrowed but never owned" (p.62). Like Rule's character Diana, Hilda learns to relinquish possession as a form of self-enclosure, thus extending her territory to encompass a furniture showroom. In this manner she manages to assimilate all the pleasures of domesticity around her whilst denying

the rights to ownership (an outlook not, however, shared by the sales manager!).

That Hilda's perceptions of the boundary lines between worlds become just as unclear as Jim's, is conveyed by a reversal of territory. Thus, sitting in the park, the overspill sound from a personal stereo projects her back into her kitchen, sounding like "Someone stirring something very shallow in a metal saucepan" (p.81); while, coming home, her perceptions of her flat project her back into the park:-

The furniture was looking like wood that has been perversely distorted...and the ornaments were beginning to look hopelessly irrelevant... (BB,64)

Only her neighbour May retains a solid awareness of the dividing line between these two worlds, rushing to remove Hilda's scavenged debris the moment she leaves her flat and, recognising the necessity of wearing appropriate clothing for appropriate spheres, worrying when the camera crew comes to interview her that:-

...since this was to be an indoor interview she couldn't wear her protective outdoor clothing. (BB,132)

The inner world of domestic space is one, primarily, of privacy and intimacy, an association commonly theorised in terms of conformity (particularly female conformity). But as Lynn Hunt persuasively argues, spatial seclusion is as much the terrain of transgression as it is the cosy moral world of the traditional nuclear family:-

In Sade's novels *le prive* has a very special place...and it is almost always figured as a prison...the emphasis is on closure but also on repetitive order.²⁰

The emphasis here upon enclosure, repetition and order reminds us of the dynamics of what is surely one of the most conformist of all domestic practices: that of housework. Although apparently at opposite ends of the moral spectrum, both housewife and pervert deal repeatedly (indeed obsessively) in hidden and not-so-hidden filth. Only their autonomy within the domestic realm differs:-

Whilst thought to be tied to the house...the housewife spends her time in spaces that service the family...The privacy...that everyone needs to establish any kind of independent identity in the nuclear family, seems to be denied [her].²¹

As noted above, none of the fictional situations under discussion here falls into the category of conventional domestic narrative. Even *The Roundness of Eggs*, though depicting what is still considered the "typical" (although not average) nuclear family²², is concerned solely with the transgression of conventional structures. And it is with regard to the dimensions of domestic space that both Olive and Edna demonstrate their status as transgressors. Stealing back for themselves a sense of autonomy along with their privacy, the introduction of forbidden pleasures into domestic seclusion completes the parallel with the transgressive libertine. It also casts ironic light upon traditional masculinist attitudes towards property ownership:-

The possession of an entire house is [now] strongly desired by every Englishman; for it throws a sharp well-defined circle round his family and hearth...²³

Contrary to surface appearances, neither Jim nor Harry owns an entire house, because a small part of that dwelling (literally or conceptually) is set aside as the domain of the housewife through her immersion into the fantastic. The presence of this small part provides enough of a crack or gap to disrupt domestic stability, and prevents either woman from being entirely constrained within the limits of hearth and home. Olive's choice of the attic as transgressive space is, of course, historically typical. The bourgeois home of the nineteenth century usually apportioned the top storey of the house to servants as living quarters. In doing so it was transformed it into a space, according to Michelle Perrot, invested by the mistress with a variety of sexual fantasies which, according to Alain Corbin, the master of the house translated into clandestine practice²⁴. Olive, we note, adopts this site for a combination of both; not because adultery is her fantasy, but more particularly because fantasy is her adultery. But ironically it is this issue that renders Edna (superficially the epitome of conformist femininity) the more transgressive of the two. While Olive cordons off a separate sphere for such escapism Edna, whose "daily service" to her husband combines domestic servitude with religious devotion, secretly snatches back part of Harry's own territory as her site of transgression.

As Bachelard notes²⁵, in the context of the domestic environment as much as anywhere, space is never simply a physical concept, but in particular takes on a psychological

and emotional dimension which can be, amongst other things, either reductive or expansive. Rule's character Mary, assuming that the celebration of Christmas goes with the territory, imposes upon others a sense of her house as a space that needs filling; while David, returning to Constance and Diana's house, recognises that:-

From the moment [he] walked through the door, he felt a very different sort of space open up to him...The living room seemed in warmer light... (MB,78)

Both of these perceptions derive from the larger spatial issues raised by this text. Whereas the other novels under discussion are concerned exclusively (or almost exclusively) with the dynamics of a single domestic space, *Memory Board* is a novel depicting the dynamics of several households, and the tensions and reassessments required when previously private territory is infiltrated from elsewhere. Falling within Bachelard's conception of interlocking circles, what nevertheless becomes clear is the latter's restrictive notion of such intersections, which he assigns either to the inflexible concerns of the logician, or dismisses as being:-

...the dialectics of outside and inside [being] supported by a reinforced geometrism, in which limits are barriers.²⁶

It is precisely the awareness that such geometrical concepts are not bound by barriers that becomes clear in *Memory Board*. David's role, as in the past, is to bring news of the existence of alternative realities into the cosy seclusion of established homes; a transgressive function that of necessity challenges the notion of intimate space as a fixed and unchanging entity. Although in the past Patricia,

confronted by the existence of David's sister Diana, seals the circumference of her own circle by banishing her and Constance from the house, Patricia's death and David's subsequent re-emergence into these two women's lives makes it almost impossible for Constance and Diana to defend their circle of "sweet reason" (p.96) from intervention by others.

In contrast to the "bright rooms" of the upper storeys of the house, David gradually comes to perceive his basement flat as a dark cave which, unlike Olive's attic cave, carries clear negative weight in this context. But even more negative is the reading of subterranean space offered by *Dancing in the Dark*:-

...our house was quite big; foolishly big for just the two of us, although it was early when we bought it, and we thought there might be more. Three bedrooms, two bathrooms, an enormous basement...a gaping dark space beneath us. (DD,14-15)

Like all such breaches in the family circle this must, eventually, result in a structural collapse. Like a Gothic portent this transgressive space that (literally) undermines the perfection of the surface reality is mirrored by the gaping space within Edna's infertile body and the gaping space that opens up between their circle and that of their neighbours: an empty womb ascribing their house and world with the mark of difference. Edna's place within the domestic environment is, furthermore, entirely defined by emptiness, in that she considers her role one of making:-

...one's labours invisible, so that the other person does not observe them, but would observe their absence. (DD,99)

But if her role within the house is one of invisibility, her role outside of it is non-existent, holidays simply becoming "empty time, an uncomfortable pause" (p.134).

Edna's relationship, not just with the house but with other characters too, is also perceived in terms of positionality and space. One of the first things we learn about Harry is his uncomfortable relationship with domestic space, as illustrated by his attitude towards Edna's student apartment:-

"Nice place," he said, but not enthusiastically. I looked around and saw it for the first time as an outsider would have to. (DD,44)

His intervention here has the effect, not of defining Harry as the outsider as one would expect, but of alienating Edna from her own territory. Harry, who is consistently perceived by Edna as her romantic hero and saviour, does not so much "take her away from all this" as steal it from her, a spatial metaphor for what is ultimately to happen when she discovers his infidelity. Even Edna's sister Stella articulates financial security as a "breathing space" (p.111) in the face of marital breakdown, and pondering the lack of intimacy between herself and Stella, Edna considers:-

I have never sat across a kitchen table just talking with [her]...I have never sat out on a porch and smoked a cigarette just with her. We have only written letters and stared into space. (DD,109)

The presence of staring into space points to the absence of the sharing of space here, something Edna never fully

achieves. By the end of the narrative she is left in her twin room in a state of solitude, still "writing letters" onto the pages of her notebook, a process that is as non-communicative as her letters to Stella are implied to be. But just as Diana learns to impose order upon Constance's world by means of chalk marks on slate, so Edna learns the value of marking out territory through space:-

...the easy chair...fills the space between the narrow bed and the wide, heavy-glass window...my knees touching the base of the window ledge...Three feet, perhaps, between bed and window.(DD,2)

That Edna acknowledges this to be "precisely the right amount of space" (p.2), demonstrates the manner in which her world has shrunk in proportion to her hopes. Although referring to her life with Harry as: "...a separate world, a small and enclosed universe" (p.56), the former is actually the closest she comes to such solipsism. Her claims by the end of the text that :-

I can dance tears and weep for Harry ...I can feel his body finally in my own. I can tap along the blade into his body and weep some more, and once again dry the tears with a whirl (DD,182-3)

appear superficially positive. But the fact that the passage ends in a spin-dryer motion suggests that her endless cycle of torment continues. Not only is she left with the transgressive space of a "vacuum" dragging away at the back of her mind, the above-mentioned passage demonstrates that Edna has actually become the "vacuum cleaner": a housewife cast adrift without place or function.

Where Edna structures the detail of small spaces through minute observation, and May utilises minute spaces to facilitate the observation of others, Hilda's cramped flat is piled so high with chaos that her relationship with space is almost non-existent:-

...nothing could ever be achieved until something else was done first - but this was not at the moment a possibility... The work surface was covered in used mugs and plates but that was not serious ...that could be done any time and so therefore need not be done now. (BB,33)

Hilda's imprisonment derives, neither from her fear of the outside world, nor from being denied access to the outside world. Instead the domestic world, structured through a seemingly never-ending round of cleaning and polishing, and an equally unending cycle of purchase, consumption and disposal, looms increasingly large as a monstrous enemy which must be overcome. From this perspective, as far as Hilda is concerned a "vacuum", rather than constituting threatening space, simply becomes another object to conceal behind doors. Accompanying a refusal to fear the gaping holes that open up in her life, she takes on an entirely new attitude towards this seemingly nebulous existence:-

When she had been bored in her previous life she had thought it was...the time between the events that was the problem, the dragon that had to be overcome. But in her present life; which had no looked-for events, time appeared to be seamless...Therefore she realised it must have been the events that were the problem all along, sticking up like icebergs out of a pale calm sea. (BB,125)

Despite, or perhaps because of such transgressive absences, several of the significant incidents in these

texts are punctuated by a reinforcement of domestic barriers as, for example, when Hilda first leaves her house for the outer realm. This event is articulated with great domestic precision:-

She lugged [the bags] through the front door, put on her coat, put purse and keys in her pocket and got herself out of the flat door, and then out of the main front door, in stages. (BB,17)

Perhaps the most explicit example of this occurs in *The Roundness of Eggs*, taking the form of the following piece of dialogue between Olive and her sister-in-law Jean :-

"That's one thing wrong with the city," [Olive] says stepping into the house... "There's no horizon."...Olive pulls the heavy door shut behind. "I need to see a horizon." "You need to see a hairdresser..." (RE,102-3)

Once again it is the "heavy door" which affirms the boundaries between inner and outer, but the two-step nature of the action is also emphasised by the fact that, as with Hilda, we are given the precise moment at which Olive crosses the threshold from outer to inner as she enters the house. The fact that these two stages intervene between her statements about the need to see a horizon, help to emphasise the fact that it is domestic restraint that stands in her way (literally and metaphorically). But it is surely Rule's character Diana for whom :-

If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened... one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.²⁷

As "nothing but a skeleton in David's closet" (p.67), Diana has long learnt the power of the domestic barrier to

articulate or diffuse an emotional response, having "...put her stepfather, along with most of her growing up, in the furthest attic of her mind" (p.24), and responding to David's unprovoked re-intervention into her household by "...carrying that old, uncovered fury out of the room with her" (p.24). Simon Pugh's claims that "Sanity depends on how space is compartmentalised, on ruling by division"²⁸, meet their match in both Greenwood's and Rule's texts, both of which set out to challenge conformist regularity. Olive, pondering the possibility of making a patchwork quilt, notes "There's something about the shape of a square. But I do like circles better." (p.32). Adjoining squares, like adjoining rooms, fit together neatly to form a unified whole. To this extent the sewing of the patchwork quilt, constructed entirely from conformist fragments, embodies in microcosm the endless monotony of the "domestic ideal". Olive's preference for circles denies this possibility, for adjoining circles can only ever leave "a hole in the fabric...[that] cannot be contained", an irregularity which, far from simply signifying insanity (although one may wish to read Olive's actions as "mad"), far more positively locates her within a position of "radical absence" from which rebellion is possible²⁹.

The exploration of "freedom by enlarging spaces-in-between, including the spaces between cracks" is, as Meigs highlights³⁰, transgressive and progressive lesbian narrative strategy. In *Memory Board*, however, the series of interlocking circles that constitute the treatment of domestic relationships require the exploration of the effect upon such complex intersections once the circumference of a

single circle has been severed. One of the few insights with which Mary is attributed is her unwillingness to:-

...see the revelation of Diana's existence as anything but a requirement to shift sides...
(MB,45)

or, in this case, spheres. Thus while Diana, equally reluctant to intervene, considers the disruption of David's family none of her concern, she fails to take into account the "knock on" effect of a disturbance within Mary and Ted's family circle that will inevitable result in the disruption of her own. David must learn, in response to this, to acknowledge the presence of limits beyond which he must not step, Diana informing him "You just don't know what they are until you've stumbled into them" (p.46). That the closest he ever comes to this is his argument with Diana over her fierce refusal to politicise her sexuality, is thus appropriately implied in domestic terms when we read that he "felt emotionally and morally *unhinged* by this conversation" (p.154 - my emphasis).

Like David, Constance continually tests limits to see how far she will be permitted to go before prohibitive barriers are reinforced. Of all the restrictions placed against her only one unlocked door, leading into the garden, allows her free passage from the house. The garden, although the means by which "The countryside is domesticated"³¹ is located on the margins between inner and outer spheres, a precarious territory that has always linked it with the uncertainty of limits. The term "garden", as Pugh informs us, "originates from the same Old English root as *geard* or 'fence'"³², and to that extent is defined in terms of

containment. But from a Judaeo-Christian perspective it is also, of course, the archetypal battle-field between prohibition and transgression, an association difficult for any Western reader to overlook. To that extent the depiction of both Hilda and Constance as being most "at home" in gardens reinforces our perceptions of their transgressive status. Olive, although accused by her family of "just mop[ing] around the house the whole time" (p.32), also spends a great deal of her time in the garden. Once again the precarious relationship between licence and control is expressed through a repeated obsession with the precise layout and dimensions of Olive's garden throughout:-

The neighbouring houses are screened by vegetation. The tall trees down one side and along the bottom boundary are sixty years old. (RE,12)

And, from the roof:-

Calendula plants in the border look strangely squat from above. The flowers are circles of yellow and orange. The yellow are more plentiful but they are less than half the size. (RE,104)

As might be expected for a protagonist with Olive's name, a tree becomes the central focus for her relationship with the garden. That it is a dying avocado tree, however, rather than an olive tree or even an aubergine (egg) plant may seem a "one-step" removal from both her name and the implications of the title; but either of these two choices would have reduced its symbolic significance to a trite parallel. As it stands, the ironic absence of fleshy fruit containing an egg-shaped kernel forms the most communicative combination of the narrative concerns. Although never explicitly stated,

the theme of lost fertility is implied throughout. Olive is, we assume, post-menopausal, and our awareness of how this impinges upon her sense of self within the familial environment seems crucial to our understanding of the text. Sheltering under, of all things, a fig tree in the park, Olive notices:-

...a cluster of aerial roots...There is something about the way they hang. That's my sorrow, Olive thinks...The thought is not without comfort...the forms they make are pleasing. They possess a sort of beauty.
(RE,124)

Unlike Edna's reluctant acceptance of her disengaged Fallopian tubes, Olive expresses a longing to ground these roots in earth by means of the medium of the fantastic:-

Her fingers press into the soil [of her painting] and suddenly burst through as the paper rips....Olive's disappointment is profound. It comes not from having ruined the painting but rather from what is there. At the bottom of the hollow there is nothing but the varnished yellow wood of the table...
(RE,62)

The painting, like the garden, is an "untruth-to-nature, [an] absence of mimesis"³³ that reminds us, by means of the splitting of paper, that:-

The garden's static spaces...its seemingly passionless world, mask a powerful aggression, desire barely under control.³⁴

In this respect it is entirely appropriate that the "seemingly passionless" Edna, when she strikes out and kills Harry, does so in a manner articulated entirely through the discourse of gardening:-

It is a little like digging a trowel into soft earth in the spring to plant a flower. Once there is some hard impediment, like a root or a rock, but it's easy to twist around that, back into the softness. (DD,179)

In stabbing her husband, Edna denies her religious faith in Harry as "holy" and her secular faith in him being "whole". Instead she renders him "full of holes", a transformation that takes us back to the precarious nature of enclosures and the recognition that, contrary to appearances, Harry has simply been the weak-point in the chain-link fence of her world.

Like doors and garden fences, windows are located on the meeting point where worlds adjoin, their function in these novels being as much symbolic as literal. There is a proliferation of window imagery in *Bag and Baggage*, most of which involves others trying to keep an eye on Hilda's movements, the window permitting the voyeurs to focus her within the frame, while simultaneously utilising the pane as a safety barrier between their world and hers. Importantly, however, while such objectification reduces Hilda's sense of autonomy in one respect, at least she is always on the outside, never on the inside of the glass. In contrast to this Edna's relationship with windows is that of the typical housewife: "So many hours [being] spent here staring out, while hands did other things" (p.178). That architects typically design the layout of kitchens with the sink unit positioned beneath a window, simply underlines patriarchal contentment with female enclosure in the domestic realm. As Sue Francis observes:-

The researchers asked: 'How can life with your hands in the sink be a little more pleasant?', not: 'Why do women spend so much time at the kitchen sink?'³⁵

- or indeed for our purposes: "Why do women spend so much of their time looking out of windows?". It seems that Edna spends so much time looking out of windows, whether within her own house or the institution (and indeed when we are introduced to her she is sitting beside a large window in her room in the hospital) because, once again, it reminds her of the comparative safety of life inside the home compared with that outside. But it is important to remember that windows are not only easy to see through but easy to shatter, a signal of fragility inevitably fearful for Edna. Thinking back to her own childhood home she contemplates:-

If ever...someone had truly spoken and the anger had emerged from the woodwork and the linoleum, surely the walls would have crumbled, the roof collapsed, the glass windows shattered. (DD,103)

As a result she marvels at Harry's ability to trace paint around the edges of windows without his hands trembling, a point which demonstrates his own lack of fear at the ease with which domestic limits can be transgressed. Only when Edna returns to the domestic world after a holiday away can she feel positively about this fragility, wanting to "Put my arms around [the house] and [kiss] its doors and windows..." (p.137), precisely because of the ease with which they will enable her to re-enter safe territory.

But at times, though the stance between looker and glass is identical, the relationship with the glass may be different. In Greenwood's text, although Olive spends a

great deal of her time in the attic positioning herself against the pane, she looks inwards for inspiration as much as she gazes outwards upon the view. Ultimately she refutes the power of the glass altogether, ascending to the roof in order to frame her vista without framing herself. Olive's contempt for such fragile barriers is reiterated time and again. In particular she resists attributing fantastic powers to the window image, even at times reducing it simply to a means of disposing of her cigarette ash. Bachelard, romanticising domestic space comments:-

The lamp at the window is the house's eye...
When I let myself drift into the intoxication
of inverting daydreams and reality, that
faraway house...becomes for me, a house that
is looking out...through the keyhole.³⁶

Indeed, when the narrator informs us that "Olive flicks the light switch and the red tree leaps out" (p.62), the reader's immediate reaction is to assume, along the lines of Bachelard's theory, that the light shines out upon the avocado tree, magically transforming it in the process into "the upward thrusting tip of a healthy [one]" (p.59). But quickly we realise that the tree in question is the painted one inside the room. Olive, denying the power of a lighted window to beckon or even look out onto the outside world actually obscures it, the illumination (in true realist fashion) rendering the clear glass opaque.

In *Memory Board*, although Constance (unlike Olive) perceives windows as a means via which her fear of containment may be lessened, David (like Olive), although apparently utilising the false sense of seclusion offered by the glass pane in order to observe his family, is also in

reality more concerned with outward gazes as a means towards introspection. Aligning his position with the invisible insider, he turns the window, if only in fantasy, into a two-way mirror by which he believes he will remain unobserved. Only when his teenage granddaughter acknowledges his gaze and waves to him in reply (p.86), does the pane of glass revert to its former transparency, the structural boundaries established by the fantasy frame having been transgressed. A similar scene is to be found later in the narrative as Constance, Diana and David sit together in their mobile holiday home, watching the birds through a one-way glass which is thus simultaneously a window and a mirror. Constance, articulating this empirical phenomenon in reflective terms notes:-

It's like remembering, isn't it? You can see so clearly, but you can't make them see you... (MB,182)

In part, of course, invisible observation from a realist perspective depends upon the pane's dimensions and surrounds. May, spying through the peephole of her front door at the bailiffs, is secure in the knowledge that her gaze cannot be returned, the glass being as impenetrable as the wooden door itself. In contrast, Hilda's living-room window operates almost as an open door, permitting visual access even if physical access is denied. But May uncharacteristically transforms this situation into a transgressive opportunity through mirroring the bailiff's actions. As he stands:-

...right up against Hilda's living room window, his hand up to the glass to cut out the reflection (BB,53)

May is pressed to the surface of her own glass pane behind him, projecting him through mimicry into a world of reflection over which she has at least some control. In emphasising the duplicitous nature of transparent barriers these scenes alert us to the importance of the fragile distinction between windows and mirrors and their respective relationships with the border territory between real and fantasy worlds. It is important to remember that those who have the physical and mental ability to move freely across this territory find the doorway of the mirror a welcoming image. To those like Constance, for whom such a movement is limited or denied however, the mirror simply turns back upon itself and the protagonist is:-

...caught and trapped...driven inward,
obsessively studying self-images as if
seeking a viable self.³⁷

But windows and mirrors tend to function differently in realist literary forms than in fantasy forms. Even Olive, despite her contempt for windows in reality, dreams of encountering the fantastic flock of birds in a secret underground chamber of the house. At the end of the dream they fly free from a window of truly fantastic proportions (windows, in reality, being not only pointless but unopenable underground). From this perspective, it is thus not surprising that in *Dancing in the Dark*, which is superficially a realist text consistently undercut by the transgressive power of the fantastic, this is made particularly "clear". Taking up her conventional insider's stance, Edna watches from the window of her apartment, gazing out into the darkness at:-

...the people passing on the sidewalk, sitting out on their porches for the last late-autumn warmth. They couldn't see me, sitting in the dark. They wouldn't have even thought to look. (DD,37)

Despite being thus positioned, the use of the phrase "sitting in the dark", reminds us of the absence of "dancing in the dark", an absence that is shortly filled as Edna closes the curtains and retreats from the glass, withdrawing more fully into her fantasy world:-

...[I] lay down on my makeshift couch, and became again the singers and the dancers...and sometimes I fell asleep lying there and dreamed in the other lives, not my own. (DD,37)

In fantasy, the window often functions as a tantalising symbol because of its ability to beckon and yet deny (just like the tiny door which denies Alice access to the beautiful garden). Whilst in the realist sections of the text the window encloses Edna within a confined space, here it is seen as a gateway into fantasy, even if that gateway paradoxically functions by denying rather than permitting a crossing on the threshold. Equally different is the treatment of mirrors in each case. From the perspective of realism, mirrors are both a measuring-stick and a source of dismay for Edna, whose obsession with surface detail extends to that of her own face. The endless repetition of her own returned gaze is in itself mirrored by the narrative, which reflects endlessly on the futility of Edna gluing her world together by means of creams and cosmetics. Eventually concluding that "I could not quite make out salvation in the unsmudged glass of mirrors" (p.145), Edna perceives that her "made-up" world is, in reality, crumbling around her.

In fantasy, however, her mirror joins with her pillow to transform her reflection into a fantastic lover. Framing the limits of her romantic world, the most significant mistake Edna makes in marriage is to believe Harry's desires to be the mirror image of her own:-

...I thought (how stupidly) that [the outer world] could not really be his passion; that truly it must be in our home. (DD,15)

Once the "mirror is shattered, the pillow shredded, the man torn" (p.181), two consequences arise. The first is that, as one might expect, her reflection falls into pieces too, Edna finding in it "many more faces than just this one" (p.21) and concluding:-

I have spent hours looking into mirrors; and yet I don't know if I would recognise myself, if I met me in the hall or on a street. (DD,21)

The second consequence is that symmetry is lost. Looking across the dining-table at another patient in the institution, she reaches out to touch her in an attempt to confirm whether she is, indeed, a mirror image of herself:-

I stroke her cheek. It is hot and smooth. She jerks, pulls back. She is more than startled; frightened and fierce as well. When she pulls back it is more than her face, it is her whole body...She leans forward and swings her arm across the table and crashes her palm across my face...it doesn't seem to have much to do with me. I have felt her skin, and it is warmer than mine; not the same, not the way it looked. (DD,78)

This mirror's loss of its reflective powers, begins significantly with Harry's death:-

People stared.

...Harry and I would have been out doing the same thing if it had been one of them.

...It must have cheered our neighbours to have it happen next door, across the street, not in their own living rooms or kitchens.
(DD,121)

Although shattered; rather than being destroyed, the magic mirror simply reconstructs itself as a window. By removing the threat of actions being identical on both sides of the glass, Edna's voyeurs (like Hilda's) remain safely unscathed, placed on the other side of the safety-barrier.

But the borderline territory of the domestic has always been associated with transgression. After all:-

Brothels stood on the border of [these] worlds...to the uninitiated they could "pass" as private residences; as part of the culture of an area and a community, their presence was public knowledge.³⁸

All of the central protagonists in these texts are marginalised by their ex-centric relationship with the domestic sphere. To that extent is it interesting to note how frequently we find them teetering upon the edge of boundaries and perimeters. As Olive recognises:-

Only two places to go...One is up and the other is down. She feels on the very edge. A small slip either way would define the direction. (RE,161)

Constance repeatedly, if timidly, loiters on the thresholds of unfamiliar spaces (even being prepared only to dabble her feet in the jacuzzi at Borrego Springs), whereas Diana, the "homebody" locates herself solidly within the core of the house as the anchorpoint to which the former can return. David, when asked "Are you reliable?" replies: "Within

limits" (p.61), an apparent qualifier which is actually a reinforcement belying a reluctance to transgress, framed as he has been by fixed rules which he spends the entire narrative (not always successfully) trying to reassess.

We have seen that Hilda's preference for border territory extends to a variety of locations. In contrast to this although May, like Constance, is frequently located on thresholds she prefers, like Diana, to restrain herself within secure limits whenever possible, even if it results in her feeling "chained into her own home like a dog" (p.52) at times. To that extent her peripheral social positionality is a source of discomfort to her, as is literally manifested by her positioning of a bedraggled Hilda "in the corner of May's sofa" while she "stand[s] over her...too on edge to sit down herself" (p.72).

Transgressions from Within the Body of the House

Unlike the characters noted above, Edna never manages to position herself on the borderlines between spheres, simply exchanging one version of the inner world for another. However, the transgression of limits when it finally does take place comes to find Edna in the form of the telephone which, although located within the inner sphere, functions as the frontier point by which the outer world crosses over into the inner world by means of electronic impulses. Thus we see that, however apparently insurmountable, domestic barriers can always be transgressed and the more firmly they are reinforced against the outside world, the more likely it is that transgression will take

place from within the body of the house. The avocado tree, although Olive's alter-ego is, at times, also her enemy. In this respect it also mirrors cancerous tissue, the latter (like Olive's relationship to the family unit) being simultaneously part of the self and yet a threat to the self. A multiplicity of cancerous references proliferate within the body of the text, a theme reinforced through Olive taking up smoking which, like her fantasising, becomes a clandestine pleasure associated with the attic. Towards the end of chapter three, having dreamed of a figure who seems to represent in fantasy the cigarette girl encountered in the realist sections of the narrative, Olive awakens at the point at which "Her body is braced as if to receive a blow". Although superficially dreaming of shipwreck, that "the vessel [then] passes from the calm into a mountainous swell" (p.49) implies that concealed cancerous tissue forms the disturbing link between fantasy and reality here.

Initially, when Olive explicitly comments that water imagery is the main focus for her dreams, the reader's response is one of irritation over not being allowed to deduce this for herself. However, appropriately for dream narrative, the significance of this emerges aside from direct references to water. Dreaming, for example, of submerging herself in a pool, Olive imagines that she looks up and sees the surface where air and water meet above her head:-

The surface is a skin above and through it
the sky is a pale and distorted sheet. The
colours are separate but bound together.
(RE, 27)

Here the significance of the dream clearly resides in its treatment of the presence of malign influences below the surface calm of the skin, an intervention that will result in all established limits beginning to break down (as illustrated by the blurring of boundaries between water and sky). Such transgression from within, although capable of being read literally as an acknowledgement of the presence of cancer within Olive's body, can also be considered to apply to the transgressive presence of the fantastic which is emerging within the body of the text. In retrospect, the reader also recognises a parallel with the malign intervention of Jean within the body of the home, a presence that reminds us of Rule's character Patricia who "Even a year dead...was lodged in Diana's memory like a tumour" (p.20).

Jean's infiltration of Olive's inner world introduces a note of malice in the text most appropriate to the gothic narrative, as we shall see. For the time being that it is Jean who, in making the first explicit reference to cancer, stresses the anatomical similarity between Olive and the latter's dead mother-in-law is worthy of note. The reader's knowledge that, in contemporary gothics, the central female protagonist:-

...is always in some fashion a "stand-in" for someone else, usually someone who has been killed" ³⁹

alerts us to the malicious possibilities inherent within Jean's words.

As well as acting as a metaphorical linkage between rebellion within the body and rebellion within the body of the household, vessel imagery has a more direct domestic application. The "empty vessel" epitomises the role of the ideal woman within the traditional domestic sphere (a point again recognised by Diana when describing her mother as "a house from which the occupant had fled" (p.64)). In Barfoot's and Greenwood's narratives such imagery combines with that of hands in order to explore the means by which conformity is transformed into transgression from within. That marriage involves the "taking of the hand", and that both texts are centrally concerned with the theme of marital breakdown, perhaps explains the similarity of images used in both texts. Olive and Edna study and understand the workings of their hands in order to regain control of them, and although the latter considers it "better to hold my hands at my sides than to reach out and risk a blow" (p.30), both women finally do lash out, shattering their worlds and destroying their homes:-

Olive's hand shoots out from her side and before she knows it has swept across the dressing-table top...Fragments of china explode about the room. Olive stares at her hand in disbelief. (RE,193)

Her hand, acting apparently of its own volition to strike out at this symbol of marital constraint (added to by the knowledge that the vase is also a wedding present), snatches back its own autonomy. Once this act of bodily rebellion has taken place, the note Olive leaves for Jim (which again she seems to watch her hand write as the pen twists and turns within it), becomes a foregone conclusion. Looking at the

gash that splits her skin as a result of the broken vase, Olive sees "a sliver of bone glints blue-white and slick" (pp.193-4), but because the vase is itself composed of bone china, it is not at all clear whether the gash is so severe as to cut Olive to the bone, or whether a splintered fragment from the shattered vase has lodged in her hand. The ambiguity is important because, in allowing the boundaries between herself and the empty vessel to blur, she identifies with the shattering process via the splitting of her skin. Olive too, must explode in midair in order to gain her liberation.

In keeping with this approach, Edna refers to herself as "small and obscure, like a vase, or a photograph on the wall" (p.23). But unlike Olive, rather than looking to shatter and throw off her domestic confines, Edna depends upon Harry to anchor a domestic reality that will prevent her from "shatter[ing] into pieces just sitting in my chair" (p.143). Instead of the vessel, it is the reality that is blown apart, in response to which:-

I wanted to keep very still...I was precious and fragile like a piece of transparent china, and could easily be tilted out of place and broken. (DD,175)

Once again transgression takes place by means of hands, *Dancing in the Dark* opening with a preponderance of hand imagery. In tune with Edna's preoccupation with surface reality, so she begins by focusing in upon the detail of Harry's hands, comparing them with her own. When Edna comments that "Harry lay in his hands for me" (p.5) we are alerted by the communicative power of the "unspoken"⁴⁰ to

the implied similarity between the words "lay" and "lie". The terms are, of course, employed in an ironic reversal of the truth. Harry's hands, in continuing to stroke and caress her body, actually lie to her, while "laying" elsewhere. Similarly, when Edna continues by wondering if "...my hands, for all I tried, did not go far enough" (p.7), although the immediate narrative context demonstrates this to be intended as a judgement upon her domestic hygiene, the sexual innuendo is again present, a *double entendre* insisted upon by the near-repetition of the phrase a few lines further down the page. That the continuation of this passage, which lists a catalogue of domestic details, concludes with the sentence "There were no secret dirty places" (p.7) surely confirms this as a sub-conscious recognition of a lack of sexual adventurousness also implied elsewhere in the text. Harry's hands are innately transgressive; Edna's have to learn to be:-

So his hands went out and mine stayed in, and together, only four hands necessary for this, two of his, two of mine, we played ring-around-a-rosy in a closed circle, just the two of us. (Except that one of his hands was busy elsewhere, and we had only three.)
(DD, 6)

Despite Edna's reluctance to break out of Oakley's domestic circle, transgression from within forces the rupture, transforming the circle, as we shall see, into a triangle of desire comprising Edna and Harry at the two angles of the isoseles form, the adulterous lover (be it Harry's secretary or Edna's fantasy world) taking up a post at the apex. Once this comes to light Edna's relationship with her own and other hands does take on a transgressive quality:-

...the yellow hand that showed the seconds went around and around so slowly, slowly, time all finished in twelve hours and then an instant. Two-eighteen in the morning. Two-nineteen, two-twenty. Over by then. The twelve hours and the moment, done. (DD,12)

Adultery is, of course, the ultimate transgression from within as far as the domestic realm is concerned. Referring at one point to her seclusion within the home, Edna refers to it essentially as manual labour: "...thoughts only things meandering through the brain while hands did the important jobs" (p.84); the hands here referring just as easily to Harry's as to her own. If this is read as an allusion to Harry's hands, then the "important jobs" are both those he undertakes at work and those he carries out with his lover because it is these, above all, that have the greatest repercussions upon the family home. Considering that the protection of the domestic realm is described in terms of hand imagery, Harry really does destroy from within, turning building materials against themselves. Like the domestic realm in which it is "properly" situated, "marriage is connected to the emergence of man's ability to establish boundaries", the husband's role within this institution being "one who creates and guards confines"⁴¹. Tony Tanner, whose words these are, goes on to argue that if one such boundary is transgressed, then the structure of the whole collapses. Returning to the circle of hands, the (wedding) ring, like the intersecting circles of *Memory Board*, cannot exist intact if the circumference is severed. Instead the whole falls apart, or at best is metamorphosed into a different structure as the transformation of circle into triangle demonstrates.

One of the assumptions with which Tanner opens his very interesting study of fictional adultery, is that only women can be genuinely adulterous⁴², an assumption backed up by numerous historical sources⁴³. Unlike prostitution, which takes the private out into the public, adultery invites the public to invade the private from within. It is therefore, as Ursula Vogel comments, primarily an offence against the notion of property⁴⁴, as is made clear in *Dancing in the Dark* where the "hidden flaw" which Edna obsessively tries to unearth through recollection, is perceived to exist somewhere in the material structure of the house itself. Although Edna is the character with whom the home is most closely associated Harry, in line with tradition, is very much the house-"holder". To this extent, if property conventionally belongs to men, and adultery is a crime against property, then only the wife's (never the husband's) unfaithfulness can be truly adulterous, a conclusion that has important implications for the transgressive potential of the fantastic, Edna wondering if it is actually her afternoon dreams that "may have been the flaw" (p.90). Vogel, documenting nineteenth century legal attitudes towards male and female infidelity, uses the term "transgression" only in the context of the latter. Male unfaithfulness is described (although not uncritically) as an "occasional lapse from virtue"⁴⁵. From this perspective it is interesting that, although none of the central protagonists in these texts are literally adulterous heroines, applications of Tanner's theory are relevant in each of the four texts.

On one level, as already implied, Olive is adulterous in the sense that her fantasy world becomes her means of escape from marital constraint, Edna because her fantasy world becomes a supplementary world of pleasure. Like Harry, Edna never intends her extra-marital pleasures to destroy their home; but also like Harry she fails to recognise the full implications of inviting the outside world to invade domestic territory. Edna's lapses into the fantastic are, on the whole, associated with those periods at which Harry is away from the domestic sphere, but just occasionally such lapses are when she is closest to him:-

...I remember that sometimes my mind simply moved away, off into a corner of the room, and my eyes were watching as if I were not a part of it at all... From that perspective I saw two strange people on the bed, his familiar buttocks shuddering, legs tensing; and up and down, up and down the body moving. Beneath his heaving outstretched body, I could barely see myself...I did wonder, though if this were a flaw or some sort of betrayal. (DD,127)

This passage only operates as an insight into the nature of her own sexual relationship with Harry insofar as it illustrates, once again, how little genuine pleasure she derives from it. Far more illuminating is the fact that Edna's lack of personal involvement here, coupled with the non-specific details of the female partner, suggest that this is in fact a vision of Harry's adulterous relationship, not a defamiliarised vision of their own. The ironic recognition of this as a "flaw" or "betrayal" applies, therefore, not to her own inattention to Harry, but to his inattention to her. That this is a transgressive moment is implied by the fact that Edna projects herself into the

corner, the very place where she fears "hidden things" may collect. By means of the fantastic she, not Harry, invites the stranger into her home:-

Oh, I have tried not to see precisely. But there it is, the sweating bodies rolling and touching...Bodies slithering together, words and touches. (DD,167)

That Edna describes this scene in terms of desire and language is in itself significant, these being the two concepts she finds most problematic on the level of reality. So the "other woman" fills the spaces she leaves, transforming marriage into a geometric jigsaw, adultery providing the otherwise missing piece.

Tanner, in analysing the role of "The Stranger in the House", acknowledges the significance of hospitality to this issue, arguing the paradoxical nature of such to be that, while the assimilation of an outsider within implies the simultaneous setting up of exclusory boundaries protective of domestic territory, this actually underlines, once again, the precariousness of such limits, and indeed might even be argued to invite transgression⁴⁶. One of the means by which boundaries are reinforced in the face of this stranger is made clear in *Bag and Baggage*. When the bailiffs arrive in an attempt to evict Hilda and when the camera crew later arrives to interview May, the latter's behaviour in each of the two situations is uncharacteristically transgressive. Once she feels the crew to be trying to depict her in a manner that distorts her version of domestic reality May refuses to conform to their rules, considering:-

She wasn't sure why it mattered so much, unless it was...a way of keeping a semblance of control in the face of stronger forces. (BB,135)

The word "stronger" here, which could very well read "stranger" in this context, demonstrates that because each individual flat is only one sub-section of a larger building, the boundaries between them are, by implication, fragile. Consequently, a direct threat to Hilda's household constitutes an indirect threat to May's. In banishing the stranger from Hilda's door she reaffirms the solidity of her own. But ironically, of course, however hard May tries to deter strangers, the most significant "stranger in the house" in Allen's text is Hilda herself. To that extent May is powerless, because transgression has already taken place from within Hilda's flat and, as implied by the following, May's relationship with her own domestic setting is inevitably implicated:-

Very depressing, May found it, living opposite a boarded up flat, especially as its bleak and blind look was horribly in tune with her life. Things seemed to be closing down on her... (BB,97)

A rather more conventional exploration of this theme is to be found in *Dancing in the Dark*, Harry suggesting that Edna invite her sister Stella over, the latter having just suffered a marital break-up ironically caused by Stella's husband's adultery. Edna, however, although concerned for her sister, is far more concerned by the threat she may pose to her own domestic world:-

...I didn't want to bring the glowing Stella...into my cool and perfect sanctuary...She might make a difference, if he saw us, just the two of us, together, and noticed what I wasn't. (DD,116)

In both Greenwood's and Rule's text, we are similarly confronted with the disruptive power of the familial interloper (in itself a role that is simultaneously alien and familiar thus adding additional precariousness to the situation). As we have seen, notions of property are irrelevant to Constance and Diana's relationship and so, therefore, are concepts of adultery, Diana even learning "to accept desire as the gift that it was, no matter who happened to bring it into the house" (p.57). The primary interloper here of course, is David, the character with whom the narrative opens, and who has narrative point of view for much of the text. To that extent the reader is encouraged into the unusual stance of an identification with the third party of this *menage-a-trois*, a problematic perspective whereby we banish David from the body of the home only at the expense of banishing ourselves from the body of the text. But David is not, of course, the first interloper, that being Jill Carlysle who, at least in sexual terms, is the "other woman" of the narrative. To this extent it would not be true to say that material possessions (as opposed to relationships as possession) are unaffected, because the infiltration of this interloper is entirely conceptualised in terms of rooms and space, Jill's sole claim to this relationship being an empty chair in the living room and two empty rooms upstairs. That both claims are eventually taken over by David means that, unlike in Greenwood's and Barfoot's text, the transgressive absence that has existed

in the centre of their domestic space is finally filled: "whatever ghost of prior claim [having] been routed" (p.79).

Like Olive with Jean, one might expect Constance to feel ousted by the presence of this "intruding stranger" (p.45) into their established home, and indeed although Diana reaches the point where:-

...not used to being alone with her brother...she was only aware of it now because no guard went up in her...(MB,102)

all is not as cosy as it might at first appear. As noted above, immediately following the invasion of David's family, Constance leaves home for the first time. That this is followed by a series of lesser escape attempts is not insignificant with regard to the concept of exclusion. Having waited for Constance to retire to bed so that David can recount to Diana the means by which he retrieved her from the mountain path, David and Diana sit together on the porch in a manner not unlike that by which we will see that Olive is excluded by Jim and Jean. Although at times Constance clearly does welcome David, asking Diana "Well, when is he coming home?" (p.213), on the day that David fully moves into the house, Diana finds Constance in the bedroom packing, greeting her with the words: "I'm going home..." (p.244 - my emphasis). In opposition to our perspective, Constance is unable to differentiate between David's entry into the domestic sphere and her own removal, her use of the first person singular here clearly denoting, however unconsciously, a sense of being supplanted. The note upon which this issue is left, is hardly more positive:-

She glared at [Mike] through the crack in the door... "...you don't have to play the troll under the bridge because you don't scare me..."

She laughed, and he laughed with her, sounds which came down the stairs to Diana where she stood guard at the open front door, for she was afraid Constance might try to bolt from all this confusion being inflicted on her, some of which, when David settled in, might be permanent. (MB,246)

That this passage begins with an apparent transgression of physical and societal boundaries could be read as a positive breakthrough; but surely this extract unequivocally demonstrates that Constance, her seclusion invaded by not one but a series of strange men, is finally defeated. David, unable to "break down the walls [Patricia] built after little David died" (p.118) finally succeeds in this attempt with regard to his sister and Constance and, as noted above, broadens their circle only through his own intervention. The reader cannot help but wonder why, after forty years of domestic contentment these two of all women finally feel the need to have a *man about the house*.

But as noted above, it is the intervention of a woman in the house that threatens Olive's domestic domain, Jean's intimacy with Jim being in clear contrast to Olive's exclusion, something particularly emphasised by the positioning of characters within the house. Olive's removal to the attic has already been mentioned, but as if Jean's arrival fully supplants her within the main space of the home we find Olive, like Edna, looking on as:-

Jim and Jean and the fire and the television form a circle in the room... The boundary of light [from the standard lamp] coincides with the boundary of the circle.

Jim and Jean laugh...They have the same square jaw and high cheek-bones but Jean's features are as feminine as his are male. A man and a woman. There is no way into this circle. It is balanced in every sense.
(RE,97)

Under the terms of Russ' reading of the contemporary gothic narrative, although Jim may appear to fall decidedly short of the image of the "Super-Male", Jean is quite easily assimilated into the role of:-

...Another Woman who is at the same time the Heroine's double and her opposite...worldly, glamorous...flirtatious, irresponsible, and openly sexual.⁴⁷

In the extract quoted above we see that Olive, rather than being a wife supplanted by a mistress, appears to be a wife supplanted by a wife, the intimacy described being companionable rather than sexual. But of course in Russ' terms the Heroine's rival is frequently the central male character's present or first wife. Although Jean is neither of these, she is his sister, and to that extent the dynamics of the situation are largely similar. That it is Jean who answers Jim's greeting on arriving home from the office, despite being with Olive in the marital bedroom; Jean whom Olive overhears laughing with Jim in another room; and Jean who, on departing at the airport:-

...kisses Jim at the departure gate [and] whispers something into his ear. When he turns, [her] red lipstick lips are printed on his face (RE,174)

all emphasise this adulterous position. But this is not to suggest that Jim and Jean are literally involved in an incestuous affair. Far more significantly Jean's tainting presence, like her perfume, infiltrates the domestic space in a manner that interferes, not so much with Olive's husband but, far more significantly, with her adulterous lover: her fantasy world.

The Transgressive Challenge to the Limits of Reality

Conformist creativity is the perfect housewife's *raison d'être*:-

I wanted perfect textures in the food, and perfect colours...I did more than cook and serve, much more. I arranged. I was an artist. I created his home. I sketched each moment of the day with care, so that the portrait of his desires was precise when he arrived. (DD,9)

Prior to Harry's death it is, ironically, through reproductive forms that Edna patterns the means of their existence, even entering marriage as a means of tracing the lines of feminine conformity:-

...like having the pattern of a dress to sew, merely a matter of taking something already laid out and cutting and stitching it properly, following the lines. (DD,73)

Just as deviation from the ready-made outline may lead to seams fraying and gaps forming, Edna fears departing from norms, and assumes (if erroneously), that reproductive creativity in the form of childbirth will also follow as part of the process. But such an embracing of mimesis and repetition is irrevocably challenged after her murder of

Harry, at which point she becomes far more resistant to reproductive modes. Refusing to: "Write me a story about your house. Or draw me a picture" (p.14), Edna fails to perceive any purpose in artistically reproducing something that no longer exists for her. Whereas formerly transgressive creativity, as epitomised by the poetry of some of her fellow students, unnerved and disturbed her, when faced by the horror of a shattered world, coupled with an acceptance that she has just destroyed its anchorpoint in murdering her husband, only the abstract offers her the power to transcend the real and thus re-anchor her existence:-

I sit down to try to pick patterns from the swimming golden flecks [on the wallpaper]. Much better than cooking the perfect meal, or shining the perfect crystal. I have accomplished something here, I have found the moment. (DD,180)

As this passage demonstrates, Edna's awareness of pattern remains constant despite transgression. Just as her romantic dreams transform her life into:-

...a connect-the-dot puzzle in a child's magazine. A straight vertical line rising from the bottom, from birth to five...vertical again to twelve; and then a long flat horizontal stretch to be trudged along to twenty. And there the lines might change, go anywhere, a new pattern might begin... (DD,35)

once her world has shattered into a series of disjointed fragments, consolation remains in the form of the straight lines and regular shapes of her surrounds:-

When I lie in bed looking up, what I see are white ceiling tiles. I've counted the holes in them, which is not an easy thing to do...But by going slowly and patiently along the lines, I have counted twenty-three along each side. Each corner hole, of course, is counted twice, once for each of the two sides it connects. (DD,130)

But hints of disruption emerge at this stage, the apparent precision of the pages of her notebook being likewise disrupted by the transgressiveness of the circular form:-

...lined thinly with grey, a pink stripe marking a margin at the side of each page, three holes cut into each margin, round and precise.... (DD,1)

Circles, and their transgressive potential become, unsurprisingly, a source of suspicion for Edna. Prior to her discovery of Harry's infidelity, life is entirely in line with the above-mentioned theorisation of domestic labour as: "A continuous cycle of clean-soiled, soiled-clean" (p.85). But more significantly her relationship with Harry is also perceived to be a "magic circle" (p.64) untouched and untouchable by harsh reality. Once this fairy ring is cut through by the phone call from Dottie Franklin, however, just as the previously unending cycle of domestic tasks is irrevocably ruptured, so all associations between cleaning and circularity become synonymous with the harbouring of hidden and transgressive flaws:-

Sometimes it seems to me that people see only circles: their jobs are done in circles, and corners are always missed. The woman who vacuums in this room, for instance, never gets right into the corners, and when she washes the windows or the mirrors, she makes only circles on the glass, misses the square edges... Am I the only one who sees? The only one who knows the importance of the unlikely, hidden spots? (DD,68-9)

Allen's character Hilda is also seen to be seduced by pattern and regularity:-

...there had been twenty-five years of youth, twenty-five years of marriage, twenty years of widowhood and now it was time for some new direction. The fact that the third section of her life had been shorter than the first two she put down to time going faster as one grew older. (BB,56)

But whereas for Edna such patterning anchors reality, for Hilda, creative abstraction is very much seen as a critical commentary upon the reproduction of reality as a negative and sterile preoccupation. Looking at a plant she has been sketching in the park she recognises:-

What was the point of trying to recreate in another form something which was already perfect as it was? (BB,30)

and valuing instead the liberating potential of abstract art she:-

...walked around the flat in her mind...it had blanks in it, like a drawing splashed with a colourless paint.(BB,115)

Similarly in Greenwood's text, artistic metaphors tie in closely with the challenge to realism that is taking place throughout. Predictably, Jim favours the reproduction of "life as it is", recognising his own privileged position within the home. Olive, however, aware that "conformity between [the medium] and the world of things is always illusory"⁴⁸, becomes increasingly unsettled, unlike Edna, by the masquerade involved in conventional domestic forms. Even when Jim tells her of a "false spring" that has resulted in the plum tree blossoming before time, Olive is upset by the

statement primarily, we assume, because such "false flowering" is so reminiscent of her own mimetic reproductions in paint:-

It's as if the flowers have drawn themselves...Without doubt the painting is very good and yet in some way she is disappointed. It has failed to fill her belly. (RE,57-8)

True female creativity, like the print she sees of the storm at sea (p.40), she considers to be the product of tensions held, a state ironically reminiscent of her domestic situation. Only later, when she paints her Self-portrait, pushing back the limits of the real, does she find herself literally drawn into the canvas.

Although it is an oversimplification to say that art which transcends realism is necessarily fantastic, we do see it operating as a transgressive challenge to the confines of domesticity which paves the way for fantastic intervention. By the time Olive finally breaks free from the domestic realm, her rejection of conformist domestic practices is so acute that she refuses to treat the cut on her hand by either having it "dressed" or "stitched". But she must be punished for this. When the twins, looking at the Self-portrait, scathingly comment:"'Has she fallen from an aeroplane?' 'Or was she pushed?'"(RE,135) the note of threatening malice contained in these words is that shared by her family as a whole, evoked by Olive for daring to transgress the conformist limits of the housewife, whether by: failing to be the "perfect wife", smoking in the attic, or refusing to constrain her art within the limits of mimesis.

Geometric patterns are thus a key preoccupation for Olive. Sitting with her family, she folds a piece of gingham cloth repeatedly (almost obsessively) into smaller and smaller pieces: "Squares inside a square, she feels like muttering" (p.33). Increasingly honing in upon details, everything (including her reflection) breaks down into an abstract preponderance of sharp angles and hard geometrical shapes; although reproductive forms offer little more in the way of solace, as an old photograph of Olive demonstrates:-

The smiling girl...simply dissolves into a series of black and grey dots. The collection of shapes and shades has no meaning at all.
(RE,14-15)

Gradually, however, Olive learns to turn her fascination with defamiliarisation into a transgressive challenge to reality. Thus a flower is pleasurably appreciated as "a single stamen...dividing finally into five minute velvet tips" (p.57), the all-important vase is attributed with added significance early on in the text by means of "The unfamiliar light giv[ing] it a two-dimensional look" (p.19), and even a cigarette packet is aestheticised through creative abstraction:-

The shape is neat and compact ant fits well in her hand. Inside, twenty filtertips make a pleasing arrangement. (RE,48)

Although at times disturbed by the phenomenon, as when the shadow of a tree casts jagged lines and a zig-zag pattern across a garage roof (p.185), or when, in crying out for "the roundness of eggs" in her attic, all she can see are:-

Squares and triangles appear[ing]. Breaking into lines they fall apart. Black lines and red lines move from the left and back over to the right... (RE,181)

liberation for Olive lies in the necessity to challenge and transform all established parameters. In fact triangles and diagonal lines are particularly privileged in Olive's perceptions who, in cutting toast in terms of such shapes, on more than one occasion transforms plain food into a personal aesthetics which challenges the established domestic parameters of *cordon bleu* cuisine as the only culinary artform. So, towards the end of the narrative, Olive feels reassured by a diagonal scratch across the surface of her suitcase, and a small triangle of porcelain found on the carpet from the shattered vase functions as a symbol of the shattering of her constraints rather than something to mourn. As already implied, Bachelard⁴⁹ considers geometry the most rigidly fixed of all forms of space, but this is surely an erroneous belief. Geometry is, in fact, *inherently* transgressive because it takes fixed lines and bends and manipulates them into two and three-dimensional enclosures which, at times, are perceived to be entirely malleable. Thus when Rule's character David, entering a room, looks at the abstract painting in front of him, he acknowledges that:-

[Whilst] on past evenings [he] had tried to avoid looking at [it] because of the weight of straight lines as taut as moorings, tonight [it] seemed full of an energy to break free. (MB,78-9)

Such geometrical fluidity is a concept repeatedly theorised by others in terms of desire. Tanner, for example, defines

desire as a concept which "...recognizes boundaries only as lines of demarcation to be transgressed"⁵⁰, whilst Rene Girard takes this further in centring his theory of the articulation of desire within literature upon the geometrical figure of the triangle. Olive, scanning the horizon from the roof, fixes her gaze upon the triangular white sail of a boat in the harbour, the structure of this gaze itself following a triangular model, the three sides of which are: Olive, the yacht (the apex) and the roof. For desire to exist, a gap must always open up between the desiring protagonist and the object of that desire although, as Girard notes, the gap should not be perceived entirely (or even necessarily) in terms of physical space⁵¹. In the context of this novel Olive, following Oakley's call for women to cut through the limits of the domestic circle and "step out and beyond it"⁵², must first cut through the circle that stamps her identity, transforming herself from a woman who is O-live into a woman who, in being A-live, embodies herself within the triangle of her own desires. That these desires are epitomised by the apparent freedom from constraints offered by open stretches of water and a vessel powered by the elements means that, despite Girard's disclaimer, that the boundaries of this triangle of desire are framed in terms of physical distance is entirely appropriate, physical boundaries being as much symbols of conceptual limitations as they are literal barriers in this text.

But if the boundaries of geometry offer a challenge to the dimensions of the real, then the structures of language, intrinsically linked in with our perceptions of reality,

must likewise come under scrutiny. Of all the characters in this chapter, Rule's character Constance is the one for whom the difficulty in differentiating between fantasy and reality is perceived in the most powerfully linguistic terms:-

...for everything...broke on the shores of
her mind in dissociated fragments which she
and often they could not mend into meaning.
(MB,229)

It is not that Constance's mind no longer functions as a recording device, but that her ability to replay such stored information is sporadic and unreliable. Living in the world of the eternal present, just as Constance's timer is useless until combined with her memory board, so Constance's relationship with time is really a relationship with tense, a recognition that enables her to enlist the mischievous possibilities offered by wordplay in order to translate its function into one of licence rather than control: "...I'm to go off at intervals through the day" (p.125). Bubbling to the surface via association rather than analysis, once the "natural" link between signifier and signified is shown to break down, our perceptions of reality through language are inevitably disturbed. Elizabeth Meese adopts Paul Ricoeur's terminology in referring to such a relationship with language as a "categorical transgression"⁵³, a reading which could enable Constance "to intervene in language, reinvent, or better, re-work its texture..."⁵⁴. But such utopian dreams seem rather misplaced here. Instead, what was once a pleasurable game of "verbal catch" played between Diana and Constance shifts, along with Constance's relationship with reality, into an involuntary meandering which, while still

transgressive in its ability to free Diana's conversations from "[riding] between fixed rails, ponderously benign" (p.93), no longer operates as linguistic flirtation. That Ben considers Constance to have a great skill for "opening lines" (p.128) is in itself significant, the pun inherent in this observation demonstrating that her use of language does, indeed, challenge the fixity of conceptual boundaries. But transgressions of this nature are rarely to Constance's advantage:-

Diana turned from seeing [David] out to find Constance in tears....Whatever sorrow this was, its name was locked out of reach somewhere in the storehouse of memory, out of which only emotions could sometimes escape... (MB,61)

While Diana is the author of Constance's world she cannot retrieve her from her own fictionality. In regressing beyond the limits of linguistic structures, Constance's immersion into the realm of the Imaginary is a journey which, far from being inherently liberatory, once again entraps both Diana and herself by her inability to re-emerge into the Semiotic at will.

That the structures of language are inseparably linked with our relationship with the real is not a new idea. Hilda's version of it in *Bag and Baggage*, however, is:-

I have a theory...that things always taste of their names - oranges of orange, potatoes of potato, bananas of banana, roast lamb of roast lamb. You could be right, [the interviewer] said, but what about the things we don't eat, even though they do get eaten? A zebra can't taste of zebra to a lion because the lion doesn't know it's a zebra. A zebra, she said...would taste of peppermint. A lion would know this, even though he wouldn't know the name for it. (BB,94)

Living in an increasingly self-referential world, it is no surprise that her language use also becomes self-referential. Just the hostel sucks Hilda back into an enforced domesticity apart from the outer world, so she is drawn increasingly into a communication with self that, ultimately, refuses to engage with reality at all:-

Hilda let her talk but May was aware that her words weren't really connecting with anything...the hospital world was so exclusive, so isolated from anything else, that nothing beyond its walls seemed quite real to any of the inmates. (BB,119)

A similar withdrawal from the world and its interrelationship with language, results in a silence that, for Edna, mirrors the absence at the centre of her house and her body. Tanner has argued that:-

The bourgeois home is a hothouse of desire because it contains, confines perhaps is a better word, unoccupied language just as it does unoccupied women.⁵⁵

Graham however, overlooking the important distinction to be made between "speaking out" and "making contact"⁵⁶, perceives the unconventional domestic narrative as:-

...a shout against an imposed silence...or, more subversively, it may affirm a constraint while quietly transgressing it.⁵⁷

But just as Olive, on a variety of occasions, does speak out only to have her voice ignored or her version of events dismissed (even at times by the reader); so Edna is not incapable of using language, she simply refuses to communicate. Instead of bridging gaps, she tries to fill the gaps and absences that Bataille recognises are brought into

being through the awkward intermeshing of language with reality⁵⁸, attempting to catalogue reality by the amassing of words upon paper. But Bataille is of course correct, language is always potentially slippery and shifting and as a result the activity is futile. Frequently her notebook:-

...does not contain what I want it to: which is every small thing here, all written down, identified and pinned. (DD,125)

Tanner's argument, once applied to these novels, reminds us that in exploring the problematics of perceiving the family as an anchor against "slippage or shifting in the status quo"⁵⁹, similar tensions exist within their own medium. In an attempt to:-

..."speak I" in a world where the "I" in question is uncomprehending of and incomprehensible to the dominant power structure...⁶⁰

we see that language can no more confine the reality of these women than domesticity can, in reality, confine them, and instead the unity of character breaks down. Thus Allen, documenting Hilda's relationship with her fantasy world of the television notes that "Both Hilda's smiled" in response to the fantasy interviewer (p.29) while Olive, painting her Self-portrait, projects the images simultaneously onto canvas as a manifestation of self and of other.

Just as Hilda moves out from the world of domestic enclosure and retreats from language as a means of disclosure, so she retreats from the surface reality through which both manifest themselves. Instead she transforms her

television set from a means of communication with the "real" world into a magic mirror by means of which entry will be gained into her fantasy world. That the television screen forms the borderline territory by which the limits between fantasy and reality are transgressed is made clear early on in the text, Hilda perceiving it to have been increasingly infiltrated by so-called "real" people proper to *this* side of the screen:-

Reality, which had once been confined more or less entirely to The News, seemed to have spread across the Channels until it was mostly real people on TV now - the sick, the bereaved, the robbed...all being asked 'What do you think?' and 'What's the answer?' and 'How did it happen?'. (BB,15)

Once established limits start to blur, the structures on the surface of the screen become equally transgressive. Hilda, waking from having fallen asleep on the settee, finds that the confusion with which she is confronted actually projects her into an identification with the world of the magic mirror from her position in front of the screen:-

...she didn't know the time or where she was or the meaning of the pains in her body...[The television was] showing a programme of fizzing grey and silver sparks across its screen...She struggled into a sitting position...and a human hand - as heavy as death but aggressively warm - fell on her knee. She honked with alarm and then saw that it was her own hand, numbed by the weight of her body...Hilda sat for a while...thinking how aptly the sparks on the screen echoed the unpleasant sparkling sensation as blood worked its way back down her arm and into her fingers. (BB,14-15)

Eventually, Hilda fully immerses herself into this fantasy world, projecting herself into the role of one of the "real" interviewees, mediation between realms being controlled by

the intervention of another fantasy figure, a benevolent interviewer who stands at the threshold and, at times, propels her back into reality with questions such as: "And when...did you first realise the eggs were hatching?" (p.15).

Although initially a reassessment of her relationship with the inner world of domesticity, eventually this inner fantasy world becomes, paradoxically, situated within the outer realm. At first the television screen remains literalised, even if barriers between inner and outer worlds have blurred. Thus, living the life of a vagrant, Hilda watches the sets in the outer realm of shop windows, but refers to this activity as if it were taking place at home in her own living room (p.110). But gradually the literal screen becomes an entirely metaphorical entity, a transformation with intrinsically empowering consequences:-

In her bed Hilda, sitting up straight, listened attentively to the interviewer's question, which was, 'What made you decide to take up physiotherapy at this late stage in your life?'...She smiled modestly when the interviewer said, 'I understand from your new employers that you're a natural.' (BB,122)

That this "interview" is conducted in hospital, just as May (perhaps the most persistently problematic element of Hilda's domestic existence) is leaving the ward after a visit, demonstrates the means by which fantasy, as for so many women, functions for her as "a legitimate way of denying a present reality that occasionally becomes too onerous to bear"⁶¹. In contrast, when she is immediately afterwards confronted in reality by the camera crew filming a documentary on "down-and-outs", the experience

demonstrates the falsity of her desires. Treated as an exhibit rather than a media celebrity, Hilda's own perceptions are ignored or decried. When the real interviewer asks her:-

...can you tell us what started all this?...obviously it must have been some traumatic event... (BB,129)

Hilda's awareness of this as an interaction with the "real" world rather than the fantastic, makes the discourse of surface reality with which she answers entirely appropriate:-

...you could say it was the eggs, you could say it was the milk...Of course some people would say it was the padlock, but I think it happened before that. (BB,130)

For the housewife, life is frequently composed of a succession of small problems and minute details and Hilda, taking this to its natural limits, reduces even the "great event" of eviction into the small problem of a padlock on a door. In reality, however, the director's diagnosis is that of society as a whole: "...if she is mad...then let's show her as mad..." (p.131). Only in fantasy does Hilda attain the dignity she craves:-

...her visualised self on the screen growing smarter in dress as her own self grew less attentive to personal daintiness; the visualised interviewer ascending to new heights of charm and concern. (BB,56)

Increasingly, however, the relationship between fantasy and reality as epitomised by both sides of the television screen is rendered more complex as when the two realms are brought face to face in the form of a film-shooting of a TV

drama. Installing herself on the peripheral territory of a bench in the shopping precinct, Hilda's vagrancy status enables her to remain "semi-concealed" throughout (as if she is by now considered less than human and thus simply part of the backdrop). Her empirical proximity to this fantasy world with which she is now so at home, leads her to believe others will accept her as part of that world: "I wonder who he thinks I am...Wardrobe mistress, probably, she decided" (p.109). Aside from the comic implications of Hilda, in her dishevelled state, projecting herself into the role of wardrobe mistress, what we perceive here is that the boundaries previously set up between Hilda the spectator and Hilda the fantasy participant have been transgressed. Her peripheral social positioning has enabled her to combine the two worlds and function simultaneously within both.

May, although retaining the ability to differentiate between worlds, does find the borderline between fantasy and reality rather more complex:-

The fear of the psychopath had been given to her, like a protective talisman, by her mother. She had not been brought up to believe, like her contemporaries, in Father Christmas, because it was the belief of her parents that children should be told the truth. So instead of building a fantasy of a kindly old gift-giver with a clean white beard they had constructed a fantasy of a psychopath... (BB,11)

Unlike Hilda's, May's difficulties with facing up to reality are not because she is incapable of telling fantasy and reality apart, but because the "truth" is something she finds profoundly threatening. When Hilda informs her that she has witnessed a sexual assault upon a young woman in the

park (an experience already assigned by the police authorities to the realms of titillating fantasy), May's response is also to refute the worrying implications of the incident, although for rather differing reasons:-

...Hilda's description had unsettled her. The psychopath belonged principally in nightmare; she realised she didn't want him young and multiplied and functioning just down the road. 'Of course she was asking for it,' she said...'walking through the park at that time of night.' (BB,88)

This difficulty in unravelling truth from fantasy makes it perhaps unsurprising that, pondering the possibilities of Hilda emigrating to Australia, both find it difficult to conceptualise such a move as anything other than a step into the magic mirror. Hilda, commenting that such a journey would be "...not like going to a real place" is, for once, in agreement with May who: "...didn't really believe in Australia herself..." (p.100). From this perspective one cannot help but wonder if the "lines theory" man whom Hilda considers "might have been trapped by enchantment in some mythic castle" (p.43) is not simply another of Hilda's projections into her fantasy world. Faced with such empirical uncertainties, neither is it surprising that the nervous young executive, on encountering Hilda, takes to:-

...patting his suit jacket all over in a frenzy as if to reassure himself that he was still inside it. (BB,109)

Unlike Hilda, Constance and Diana switch off their television in order to immerse themselves within the realms of the fantastic. The treatment of fantasy in all of these novels can be sub-divided into consolationist and

transgressive elements and, despite Diana's claims that "I'm not capable of nostalgia" (p.31), her fantasies of reminiscence undoubtedly belong to the former category. One of the characteristics of consolationist fantasy, as already implied, is its safe containment within a realm of the imagination which refuses to become compromised by reality. On the whole such containment is safely maintained, Diana harmlessly recollecting: David's fantasies of usurping their stepfather as futile adolescent desires (p.6); her own schoolgirl crush on her chemistry teacher as part of the romantic dream (p.62); or her childhood love for David as an alternative version of this romanticised ideal (p.63). But these limits are fully transgressed by the only example of such extended recollection to which we are given access: a previous visit to Borrego Springs. Diana, encouraged by David, allows herself to project this reminiscence forward, desiring to relive that "pipe dream" in the form of a return visit to the area. When the fantasy is re-realised it is introduced as if, rather than having been compromised through being dragged across the threshold of the fantastic, the characters themselves have actually journeyed into another world, thus leaving the borders between realms unscathed:-

"I must have had a dream like this,"
Constance said, "or else I'm dreaming [now]."

"We all must be...I must have watched too
many of those awful movies with the kids,"
David said. "I keep expecting a giant lizard
to lumber over the crest of a hill. It's
dinosaur country." (MB,170-1)

But if all three here are permitted to transgress this fantastic borderground between fantasy and reality, the

personification of such transgression in this text is undoubtedly Constance. Living almost exclusively in the present, the consolationist fantasies of reminiscence to which Diana is inclined are alien concepts to her. And yet rather than forcing her into a world bounded by realist constraints, this paradoxically transforms all of Constance's world into a world of the fantastic. As such, when memory does come flooding back, it does so as an invasion and disruption of the present, prompted solely by associative allusions that render timescales irrelevant and locations intangible. The term "wandering" is of central significance here, Constance being pulled backwards and forwards between fantasy and reality in meandering between worlds which are both mental and environmental.

By now it has become clear that "Homes" (personal or institutional), function primarily to instil overt or covert conformity within the women who inhabit them. From this perspective if fantasy is to survive at all, it must surely do so in terms of an entirely conformist framework. But Edna's consolationist relationship with the fantastic has already been shattered at the point at which the novel opens, despite the fact that, as the retrospective narrative unwinds, she reimmerses herself into the fantasy plot of a romantic text, herself the heroine who will be swept off her feet into marriage and a happy-ever-after ending:-

It would be a matter of a man. Who would see beyond my plainness, or lack of loveliness...All the Edna's I contained he would see and want. (DD,35)

While Ann Barr Snitow argues that the romance ending "offers the impossible"⁶², the sad realisation in this case is that it was impossible from the very beginning. Recollecting her wedding-day Edna remembers thinking:-

"If I can remember everything...I'll be able to go over it later as much as I want." But while I could and did many times, the recollection was as unreal as the reality.
(DD,63-4)

In attempting to transform her wedding day into a fantasy narrative all Edna is left with is the final page of a deconstructed text; the wedding day being the perfection (in both senses) of the romantic dream, but never a narrative in itself. But of course Barfoot's text is not a consolationist narrative anyway, and this climactic moment is, in transgression of romantic convention, reached only one third of the way into the novel, enabling the real climax to be an anti-climax, namely:-

...the letdown women feel as their dreams of romance and marital bliss...inevitably conflict with harsh reality.⁶³

In truth and contrary to appearances, Harry has never been Edna's fantasy hero, despite the fact that, on meeting him, she attributes him with "the missing face" of the man of her dreams. Edna's belief that "All the Ednas I contained, he would see and want" (p.35) renders Harry's inadequacy for the fantasy role completely clear, he never perceiving Edna as anything other than a housewife. When Barfoot tells us that "Harry was quite real" (p.39) this is not just a simple observation about his anatomical presence, but also signals his exclusion from the fantasy realm. Prior

to meeting him, the discourse of Edna's desires is that of fairy godmothers, handsome princes, and magical metamorphoses. But the word "dream", as far as Harry is concerned, is merely a synonym for "ambition" and Edna, embarrassed by the comparison, allows him to rob her of her fantasy world. From this perspective, although Edna contemplates the possibility that Harry "also had some hidden life inside his head" (p.92), his transgressions are entirely real and entirely mundane:-

If he were going to do such a thing, which I wouldn't have dreamed, but if I had dreamed, it would have been with someone more exotic, unreachable, someone more a challenge. Not just the person closest to hand. (DD,157)

As noted above, if fantasy is to remain safely consolationist, it must be kept on a discrete level away from domestic reality. The closest Edna comes to transforming the romantic dream into reality is during the early days of their marriage when Harry and she would occasionally indulge in "dancing in the dark" together. But that this takes place at a time when she is abstaining from fictionalising consolationist fantasies demonstrates that both cannot exist simultaneously:-

If you're like me and get what you thought was going to make you happy, the idea of it kind of fades. I supposed I should be happy. I supposed I was. But it didn't seem quite the word. (DD,149)

As in the case of her wedding day, once the fantasy of romance has been allowed access to the real, its fantastic dimensions are entirely diffused. Thus the point at which she first acknowledges her love for Harry is accompanied,

not by the sentimental trickle of tears one might expect from the romantic heroine but "my whole body wrenching like some kind of fit..." (p.53); and her first articulation of her feelings does not take the form of a whispered secret in the lover's ear, but a somewhat grudging private acceptance: "So I must really love him" (p.53). By the time she is institutionalised her "bottom drawer", that symbol of the pre-marital dream, is simply a storage space for the notebooks within which she documents her "life inside": "This was no mirror and no fantasy, but completion, purpose, end" (p.176).

One might, of course, have cause to celebrate Edna's albeit reluctant deconstruction of the romantic myth, perceiving her to have broken out of the trap of being a "passive heroine who only finds true happiness in submitting to a masterful male"⁶⁴. But as Alison Light acknowledges:-

Romance imagines peace, security and ease
precisely because there is dissension,
insecurity and difficulty⁶⁵

and on her fortieth birthday, although Edna recognises the romantic dream to be "absurd and sad" (p.142), many a reader would concur with her confession that "some days I miss the illusion" (p.126).

Because of the conformist nature of these fantasies and Edna's conformist attitude towards domesticity in reality, it is all too easy for the reader to assume that she is a completely non-transgressive character. But this is an oversimplification of her portrayal, and it is important to consider her relationship with the fantastic further before

coming to such conclusions. First of all, like the surface narrative of a palimpsestic text, fantasy as consolation is only one aspect of its full significance in this novel. Like all subversive narratives, its real significance lies elsewhere, in the realm of the "hidden things" and "the unspoken" and to this extent Edna's passion is transgressive because of the clandestine nature of the process involved, more than once described through the discourse of masturbation (p.90). In addition, referring to Harry's holidays at home, Edna comments:-

He came into the kitchen wanting a sandwich or a beer and it was midday, when he shouldn't have been there at all. Sounds were disorientating...My treats were deferred.
(DD,135)

Disorientated by the presence of Harry it is interesting to notice here that the impact of this observation falls on the effect it has upon Edna's relationship with her "treats". Curtailment of Harry's transgression from inner to outer is mirrored by a curtailment of Edna's transgression from inner domesticity to inner fantasy. In this case not just the outer but the inner world is blocked by Harry's presence, a blockage that Edna unspeakingly resents.

But transgressive elements do also emerge at the level of content, the apparent innocence of her dreams frequently being undercut by a slightly more subversive element. Although superficially still dreaming of Harry, she attributes the formerly silent form of her fantasy dancing partner with a singing voice accompanying her own. Although on the one hand this implies a perpetuation of her belief in their relationship as a mirroring of each other, she

continues: "after all, with my eyes closed I could do anything, even make him someone else" (p.91). In other words, at this stage fantasy articulates something silenced on all other levels of the text: that Edna's desires are, in fantasy, as adulterous as Harry's are in reality. To this extent we see that despite Edna's attempts to curtail her fantasies within non-transgressive territory, such constraint is beyond her control. While silenced and repressed, allowed to threaten reality but not become part of it, the fantastic paradoxically remains at its most potentially disruptive: "Pictures in the mind are not unimportant, after all" (p.38).

In Greenwood's text the relationship between fantasy and reality operates as a complex layering upon layers. Olive is explicitly accused by both Jim and Jean of evading the "real", Jim exclaiming towards the end of the narrative:-

You're always going on about dreams...This here is reality!...This here right now. The rest is bullshit and I won't have you indulging in it. You're ruining our marriage.
(RE,193)

Olive's relationship with the fantastic is the focus for her transgressive status and operates, as we see here, primarily as a challenge to the structures of domestic reality. At times the location of the boundary markers between the two realms is made quite clear, the narrator informing the reader that Olive is moving into a dream or fantasy sequence. However, whereas in these cases the boundaries may be clear, the relationship between the content of each sphere may not always be so immediately apparent:-

Olive is putting a brown-paper bag of shopping into the back seat of the car ...something moves and a flounder leaps from the bag. Olive stretches around and takes it in her hands. Its spine arches and curves. "It's still alive," she says.

Jim's attitude is disapproving. "It's a cup," he says. "Anyone could see that."

"A cup?" He pours fruit juice onto the fish. In some way it does seem to behave as a cup, but it is still a fish...

"It's very old china," a woman says. "You can tell by the handle and the rim is smooth."

"Yes, and these vertical lines," says Jim.

Olive gets out of the car...She can see her hand half curled but it really is her hand. (RE,129)

One can, however, unravel the relationship between the dream content here and the realist aspects of the text in the following manner. The hand and the cup represent animate and inanimate vessels respectively (both recalling the vase smashed at the end of the novel). That the fish is an unrestrainable object looking for escape, points to it as a representative of the transgressive Olive and not the passive vessel Jim perceives it/her to be. As a result of this where Olive sees flexible curves, Jim sees unbending vertical lines. The unnamed woman, who presumably functions as Jean's surrogate in the dream, intervenes in order to support Jim's version of reality and undermine Olive's. Leaving the inner world of the car however, as she will leave the inner world of the home, Olive remains convinced that her version of reality (if unconventional) is not without value and credibility. But although the act of unravelling such sequences is pleasurable in itself, for our concerns these are the least satisfactory examples of fantasy as a subversion of reality because the reader feels

cheated by Greenwood attempting such an artificial narrative device. As Cora Kaplan points out:-

...fantasy operates at three different levels at least - unconscious, subliminal and conscious levels. At each level fantasy expresses social content, but is, at the same time, separate from it.⁶⁶

To consciously fictionalise a dream as a commentary upon the realist elements of a literary text is a strange distortion of the relationship between narrative and the unconscious. After all, the realist just as much as the fantasy elements of this text are the creations of the "dreamer in broad daylight"⁶⁷. Dreams may operate as insights into reality, but they can never operate legitimately as challenges to realism. As Kaplan observes:-

...fantasy used solely or unreflectingly in this way invokes a notion of the relation between dream and fiction, without actually theorizing that connection.⁶⁸

Elsewhere, however, dream and fantasy sequences are utilised rather more interestingly from the perspective of transgression, usually by ascribing them with the status of empirical reality, thus problematising any notion of set limitations between realms. When Olive acknowledges that she is "Half awake and half in a dream..." (p.175), projecting herself in fantasy onboard a sailing vessel although clearly aware of her empirical location within the attic, both Olive and the reader are capable of keeping inner and outer worlds in mind simultaneously. What does become disturbing, however, is when the reader is unsure of whether what we are offered is a dream in stages, or an

oscillation between the two spheres. Dreaming that birds are flying free from her coat sleeves we are told:-

The movement of the birds in her sleeves is sensuous, but at her wrists where the cuffs are tighter they flutter and rip at her skin with needle claws. The last bird...struggles to be free and its feet lash backwards and forwards, lacerating the soft skin... "I'll get blood on my coat." Startled by the statement she awakens...Her wrists continue to sting... "A dream, a dream," she whispers, but the discomfort is intense. (RE,113-4)

That Olive is in pain after apparently waking may be explained away by the possibility that the dream itself could owe its existence to pain caused "in reality" by Olive having somehow hurt or scratched herself in her sleep. Nevertheless this does not necessarily banish the sense of disturbance altogether. Going into the kitchen for some warm milk:-

Olive sees the blood...her vision is filled with scarlet streaks of blood...At one spot on her right wrist minute beads of blood still swell. Milk rises in the pot on the oven...The discomfort eases...I'm cut and I bleed. Ahh, she thinks. (RE,114)

Olive, in a reversal of her usual relationship with female creativity, journeys downstairs into the kitchen rather than upstairs into the attic in order to immerse herself in blood and milk. The reversal also implies this to be happening on the level of realism. However, as the passage continues, such an assumption is challenged. Rising from bed in the morning she surreptitiously locks herself in the bathroom to inspect her wounds:-

There are no cuts. Dried blood cakes the fabric of her cuffs...but the skin...is pink and unmarked. (RE,115)

At this point Olive's exclamation might just as well be the reader's: "'Oh Jesus'...Nothing makes sense. I can't go on" (p.115), and yet we do go on. The very disorientation that perplexes us, ironically also urges us on in our desire to firmly locate the point at which fantasy and reality intersect.

To disorientation is added defamiliarisation, a preoccupation in *The Roundness of Eggs* that adds an uncanny element typical of transgressive domestic codes. That the term itself derives by apparent antithesis from the German word *heimlich* ("homely")⁶⁹ should not be overlooked. And yet despite the implication that "what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar", Freud reminds us that the reverse can be the case⁷⁰. Often it is when those objects and surroundings most familiar to us become in one way or another unreliable that we feel most threatened. Nevertheless, when Olive perceives the flock of birds flying above her house as "...a dark shape...cloudy and moving in some way and yet solid" (p.59), it is indeed the lack of familiarity and the uncertainty of the shape that adds to both the sense of mystery and the reader's own unease. Throughout we cannot help but wonder how far these birds are a source of inspiration and how far they are a threatening portent simply drawing her on to her doom.

Such paranoid characteristics so typical to gothic narratives become increasingly evident as we progress through this text, and of course Olive's fears, as both Modleski and Russ acknowledge, might well be justified:-

...people are planning awful things about
you; you can't trust your husband
...everybody's motives are devious and
complex...⁷¹

Certainly there appears to be plenty of evidence of familial conspiracy here. Even Olive's daughters, diagnosing the blemish on her hand as a liver spot, joyfully accord that she is marked for life, maliciously laughing at her attempts at its removal. Aside from the fearful possibility that the spot might well be skin cancer (a possibility reinforced by the numerous references to cancer elsewhere in the text), this "bloodstain", which she first notices on drowning the dying blackbird, and which "seems etched into her skin" (p.17), depicts Olive as modern-day Lady Macbeth whose guilty act of murder will stalk and ultimately destroy her. Continual narrative uncertainty repeatedly disturbs the reader and terrorises the main protagonist. Returning to the house after drowning the bird, Olive starts to mount the steps:-

[They] are slippery and leaping from one to the next Olive is almost knocked off her feet by a flock of birds which fly from the house through the open back door...they have gone before she has seen them clearly....it occurs to her that she might have imagined the entire flock. To imagine such birds. But no, she thinks. For I felt the cool breath of their flight on my cheek. Of that there is no doubt. (RE,18)

Struggling to make sense of disorientation, there are enough absences in this passage for the reader to console herself with the possibility that Olive, startled by the birds, is simply mistaken in her belief that they have emerged from the house. Paradoxically, this consolatory possibility is further reinforced when, a few pages later, Olive is

likewise disturbed by the fact that, looking at a tomato on the kitchen floor, she worries that "The shadow is larger than the tomato" (p.21). As this apparent disproportion is simply explained away through the rudiments of prismatic science, Greenwood allows us a fleeting moment of reader relaxation about both incidents before, as Freud comments:-

...the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, [through] something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appear[ing] before us in reality...⁷²

such effacement taking the form of Jim's final exclamation of the chapter: "Jesus, Olive!...There's bloody birdshit on the table!" (p.21). This statement, requiring as it does a reassessment of the previous incidents, permits the chilling possibility that the shadow on the floor may, indeed, be the sign of a spreading taint mirrored by the stain on her hand. For, while stains and taints in Allen's novel are simply representative of the interchanging spheres of Hilda's life, here they serve primarily as marks of doom. Paying for a garment at the sales counter of a boutique, Olive notices that a tear shed in the privacy of the fitting room has stained the blouse:-

Neither [Jean] nor the shop assistant appear to notice...It stands out dark and tattoo-neat. A small bird in climbing flight.
(RE, 89)

On returning home to discover the mark's disappearance, she fears that she has imagined its very existence. As an isolated incident this is totally unremarkable, a feasible explanation being that such a mark may, indeed be strategically "overlooked" by an assistant eager for a sale,

and might well have dried and thus disappeared by the time Olive returns home. However, although:-

...we naturally attach no importance to the event when we hand in an overcoat and get a cloakroom ticket with the number, let us say, 62; or when we find that our cabin on a ship bears that number...the impression is altered if two such events...happen close together...We do feel this to be uncanny.⁷³

The sinister factor here resides, not in the isolated incident but in the form, which is so specifically that of the disturbing bird symbolism which recurs throughout the text.

But it is the gothic *cliché* of the heroine's entrance into secret or forbidden domestic space that provides one of the most intriguing gothic elements of the text. Hearing her husband returning to the inner realm Olive considers:-

Jim is coming home...In the middle of the day? He can't be. But he is...Downstairs a door slams. Panic tightens her throat. He is home. (RE,45)

This series of abrupt sentences mirrors, once again, the implied series of steps which make up Jim's transition between realms, explicitly noted by the reference to the door, but implied by the catalogue of full stops. Unaware that she has slept throughout the day, Olive's consideration of this to be a transgression of the established order is accompanied by an awareness that, being in the attic, Jim has caught her engaged in a transgressive practice in clandestine territory. Despite superficial appearances to the contrary, Jim's presence in the house is that of Russ' brooding and oppressive Super-Male, at this point bearing

far more resemblance to a malevolent Bluebeard than to what the innocuous blurb on the back cover of the novel refers to as "her faultlessly sympathetic husband". As Russ reminds us, the culmination of such narratives "almost always" involves attempted murder⁷⁴. Irrespective of whether it is Jim's desire to "paper over the cracks" of their marriage or to wall Olive up behind them, dream narrative adds the final element. The sequence already alluded to above, in which Olive finds a secret passageway in the house, begins in the following manner:-

Jim has a number of long strips of green paper. He stands there, holding them out to her....She tries to paste [one] to the wall but the paper bubbles and puckers and sticks to her hands...She studies the existing wallpaper... Gaps show on every seam. The strips are to cover the board and plaster showing through...The harder she tries, the worse the walls look. It is a pointless exercise. (RE,190)

Rather than murder, on one level this passage (textual and contextual) communicates the fact that Olive, recognising the futility of all reparations, finally finds a previously unconsidered exit from her claustrophobic situation through suicide. But the wallpaper (and Olive's detailed attention to it) is most reminiscent for the reader of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a gothic allusion that adds extra credence to our paranoia. In addition, it also alerts us to the fact that, just as the reader of Perkins Gilman's text is almost as powerless in her degree of understanding as the heroine, so are we unlikely ever to know whether Jim's role in this narrative is protective or malign⁷⁵.

It is this catalogue of uncertainties on so many levels that make Greenwood's such a transgressive text. We expect the boundaries between fantasy and reality to be challenged and we acknowledge that any narrative working with(in) the conventions of the gothic must, as Graham argues, confront the primacy of transgression⁷⁶. But it is our own positionality that is most transgressive because we too are left oscillating on the margins between realms, holding in our heads a series of possible and possibly contradictory readings.

A Domestic Circle of Textual Absences

Circularity, to reiterate, is the defining characteristic of the domestic process. In *Memory Board* this is also the defining characteristic of the textual process. Memory and forgetting are essentially circular concepts, resisting linear chronologies and forcing us to confront the awareness that fantasy, either as reminiscence or daydream, functions primarily through repetition and similarity. As Modleski recognises, such "narrative form also reflects and cultivates the 'proper' psychological disposition of the woman in the home"⁷⁷, for: "The work of maintenance and reproduction is characterized by its repetitive and routine continuity..."⁷⁸. And yet this is not quite the full story because, as we have seen, circles in this text do overlap.

From this perspective, the early chapters of Rule's text mirror the domestic circle as a shape only just held in tension in the face of transgressive intervention. The first chapter sets David up as the hub of his own world, the

limits of the chapter framing the limits of that world, just as chapter two moves on to frame the limits of Constance and Diana's. Thus is reinforced through formal means the segregation that initially exists on the level of content. But the two circles are not symmetrical, two intruders having been permitted to intervene in the world of chapter two: Jill Carlysle through Diana's reminiscence, and David himself who, bringing with him the world of chapter one, severs the circle and allows worlds to interlock. Once formal limits are disrupted, we recognise, those of content will inevitably follow.

Chapter breaks similarly communicate the tension between boundaries in *Bag and Baggage*. Allen, dividing her narrative into twenty-five chapters, constructs all but two of them of roughly similar length. Chapters three and thirteen, however, being less than a quarter of a page long, immediately cause the reader some curiosity, the spaces rather than the words on the page alerting the reader to the fact that these are in some way transgressive. Indeed chapter three introduces the blurring of barriers between fantasy and reality in the form of what we assume to be Hilda's fantasy interviewer. This is reinforced by the fact that the opening of chapter four also continues on the theme of the intervention of the fantastic into the realm of the real, and reiterated by the content of chapter thirteen. But Allen plays a trick on the reader, because only by the time we reach the end of the text do we recognise Hilda's words in both chapters to have been directed, not at the fantasy interviewer but at the "real" one. That this can only be understood in retrospect means that we have actually,

unbeknown to us, been dropped into two unexplained textual absences that can only be filled through a circular reappraisal in keeping with Oakley's obsessive domestic patterning. And indeed it is with circularity and absence that the text concludes. Sylvia's letter, written to Hilda in response to one received from May, forms a ring of communications necessitated through physical absence on the level of content. But this is also an issue with formal implications:-

Most of [May's] letter space was used up apologising for intruding and somehow managing to congratulate herself on being a good neighbour at the same time, you know how she is. She seems to think you spend too much time in the park, or something, and don't take enough care of your clothes!
(BB,137)

That this letter communicates through the spaces between words is clear. Although May is unsuccessful in her attempts to communicate with Sylvia through things "unspoken", she succeeds (via Sylvia's letter) in communicating this to the reader, not only through absence but transgressively, in the absence of her own words, through silence.

Tanner argues that domestic transgression frequently has such consequences for textuality:-

The invisible, inaudible deed becomes a silence and an absence in the text that gradually spreads, effectively negating what is made audible and present.⁷⁹

Thus even the traditional domestic novel "writes of contracts but dreams of transgressions"⁸⁰, a contradiction which is actually rendered more rather than less acute when working with non-conventional texts such as those under

consideration here. Even Edna's notebook, though superficially denying "blots and irregularities" (p.4) is latently transgressive. Just as wallpaper, in covering the cracks, may give the erroneous impression that it holds up a house; so Edna's notebook, constructed as it is from "covers" and "sheets" (terms as applicable to bedlinen as to paper), contains a deceptive potential undermining its own surface reality, a deception that "lies" within its pages. Ultimately the boundaries burst:-

And the paper no longer binds the wounds.
Blood seeps between the pages, and oozes out
the covers. (DD,171)

That Edna warns us "not to believe truths handed out on pages..." (p.171), articulates the problematics of the reader's response to this text. Because of the novel's opening line, combined with Edna's confessional stance, there is a tendency for the reader, early on in the text, to be flattered into the belief that Edna's notebook narrative and the narrative of the novel are one and the same, the flattery deriving from the fact that, if this were the case, we would be allowed access to information denied to all other characters, including Harry. As such, we embark upon the pleasurable pursuit of the completion of the jigsaw puzzle believing that we (and only we) hold all the pieces required. Only gradually, just as spaces are left on the notebook cover for personal information to be inserted, do fissures emerge between notebook and narrative, a disjuncture positioning the reader in the cracks inbetween. Some of the gaps are quite easy to fill, sufficient clues being given in the defamiliarised recollections of passages

such as chapter twenty-two to enable us to reconstruct the sequence of events following the murder without too much difficulty. That we suspect certain absences to be mirrored by Edna's own partial understanding also spares our pride. But one deafening silence yawns like a gaping hole between "knife" (the final word of chapter twenty-one) and "People stared" (the opening sentence of chapter twenty-two); a silence resented because we know Edna to be withholding the required information. In ironic reversal of the murder-mystery narrative, the reader knows that Mrs Cormick "did it", with the knife, in the kitchen. What is missing, however, is the identity of the "detective" who reported the crime and the means by which s/he did so. That our suspicions fall upon Edna herself with, of all things, the very telephone that destroys her world, projects us into an absence composed of the most cruel of all silent betrayals.

As we journey towards the end of Greenwood's novel and the family circle breaks down, narrative circularity is reasserted:-

Silver explodes all around her and the birds are in the air over the pool...Through all this the water beckons. She lies down on her stomach and as her hands sink lower the water rises up her raincoat sleeves...She withdraws her hands and they are pink...The bloodstain is darker than ever. She swings around so it is her feet which enter the water. It runs freezing into her shoes and socks and creeps up her legs...Sink in, sink down. One small movement is all it would take...
Olive hovers on the edge. (RE,200-201)

Olive's suicidal intentions here paradoxically bring about a resistance to closure that withstands all challenges. This passage, although apparently pushing forward towards a

conclusion, actually functions as a series of retrospective allusions to earlier scenes already encountered. The explosion of silver caused by the birds evokes, of course, the image of the shattering vase which finally destroys the family circle. That the gradual immersion of her hands into water then recalls the drowning of the injured blackbird at the start of the narrative, emphasises the manner in which this passage pulls together the first and most recent incidents of narrative significance. Moving on from here, the pinkness of the hand, the soaked sleeves, and the reiteration of the darkness of the "bloodstain" recall the dream of the birds trapped within her coat-sleeves searching for freedom. As Olive takes the frustrated reader on this retrospective tour, the latter also "hovers on the edge", a position by no means resolved by the final scene of the book:-

She stands poised on a jutting boulder at the edge of the mountain top and her arms are out...her bare feet lift from the ground and she is in the air. A great laugh erupts from her belly... She glides on air currents. The movements are effortless and her body is free and light... Olive swoops and glides...She is alive. She laughs and laughs. It is her choice... (RE,204-5)

At least three readings of this scene are possible. The first of these allows us to suspend belief (in true fantasy style) and read it as a triumphalist conclusion, with Olive transgressing all imaginable limits and literally swooping above the landscape, thus embodying the text of her Self-portrait. This, however, remains a problematic reading because the circularity of the narrative structure inevitably reminds us of the opening words of the text: "A

blackbird falls to the ground..." (p.7), which surely render Olive's sense of liberation a delusion. The second and most straightforward of readings, supported by this latter point, amounts to this being a scene in which Olive plummets to an instantaneous death, the apparent elongation and concertinaing of time scales involved in the description of her flight simply mirroring the manipulations of time to be found elsewhere in the text. Finally, and in keeping with the uncertainty of the boundaries between fantasy and reality found throughout, this could be simply another of Olive's dream sequences. If this is the case, although superficially a reassuring reading, in fact this would be the most defeating of all possibilities because it would show that Olive, firmly fixed within the family circle, fails entirely to break through her confines and a return to the beginning would merely find Olive still in her garden amid an endless cycle of repetition and enclosure.

Readerly consolation is thus only possible if the narrative ending is read reductively under the terms of the first of the three readings. But such an oversimplified conclusion to an otherwise transgressive text renders this entirely unconvincing, a denial of consolation which returns us to the work of René Girard. As the mediator approaches the desired object (here freedom through flight or, in the reader's case, the climax of the narrative), the intensity of the desire increases in proportion to the extent to which the distance lessens⁸¹. Olive, in achieving her goal, throws herself at it, simply succeeding in "grasping a void"⁸². Just as we leave Barfoot's text with Edna adrift in a space of silent betrayal, so Greenwood leaves both Olive and the

reader afloat in mid-air, an ambiguity which functions as the final narrative transgression. Oakley, recounting a legal case in 1973 in which a criminal offender was forced to do housework as reparation for his crimes, quotes from an article by a woman journalist of the time:-

It may come as a surprise to the magistrate...and many uninitiated men everywhere that thousands of women in this country are interned for varying periods of time...performing the ultimate deterrent known as "housework". Many are finding it increasingly difficult to remember what offence they committed in the first place.⁸³

This penal decision, which allies the housewife's image with that of the transgressor, alerts us to the fact that Greenwood, in leaving the text open, leaves Olive with a criminal choice between life-imprisonment or self-imposed execution.

Conclusion

All four novels therefore deal with: a transgression of limits, inflicted by and upon characters, through the threat to or demolition of the established structures of domestic reality, inflicted through the intervention of the fantastic. Through working with and cutting across the traditional paradigms of domestic fiction all of these narratives forcibly demonstrate that:-

...there is some sort of contradiction between the lived experience of many women and the particular physical patterns that our built surroundings make. For instance, a chain of symbolic associations, "private, home, warmth, stability, comfort", are literally built into a physical setting...in a way that does not accurately describe the realities for women...⁸⁴

Nancy Armstrong⁸⁵, writing on the domestic novel, recognises a danger in focusing too intently upon the limits of the personal. In doing so she argues that an evasion of the recognition of personal interactions as the product of political power structures may result. In these texts the unconventional and overtly politicised treatment of domestic relations would seem to conspire against this. But a related difficulty remains. For, in their very acknowledgement of the need to challenge existing notions of the "domestic ideal" the final paradox lies in the fact that all four of these novels reinforce its existence as a powerful "norm". After all:-

Behind every woman is the image of the "ideal home"...[which] will always affect what we do even when we are reacting against it.⁸⁶

Perhaps this explains the lack of liberating alternatives offered. Consolation may be derived from the fact that, while in nineteenth century domestic narratives non-conforming (anti-) heroines must be banished simultaneously from house and text, each of these protagonists cuts through the limits of her own family circle. But the result is only ever a restricted liberation. For, whilst through fantasy transforming:-

...the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'...⁸⁷

into visualisation, articulation and presence, these women do so only by confronting the alternatives of vagrancy, confusion, insanity and death.

Notes and References :-

- 1) Joan Barfoot, *Dancing in the Dark* (London: Women's Press, 1982), p.143.
- 2) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) p.337
- 3) Mark S. Madoff "Inside, Outside, and the Gothic locked-Room Mystery" in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression* ed. by Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS, 1989), 49-62 (p.49)
- 4) Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), p.63 (Bataille's emphasis). First published *L'erotisme* (Éditions de Minuit, 1957)
- 5) Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University Illinois Press, 1989) p.x
- 6) Judy Allen, *Bag and Baggage* (London: Women's Press, 1988); Barfoot op. cit.; Lisa Greenwood, *The Roundness of Eggs* (London: Women's Press, 1986); Jane Rule, *Memory Board* (London: Pandora, 1987).
- 7) Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) p.233
- 8) Peckham Rye Women's Liberation Group, *A Woman's Work is Never Done* (London: Agitprop, 1970) p.5. Cited *ibid*, p.234
- 9) Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987) p. 61
- 10) Lucy Bland, "Feminist Vigilantes of Late-Victorian England" in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* ed. by Carol Smart (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-52 (p.43)
- 11) Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) p.164
- 12) Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) p.81. First published *La poetique de l'espace* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1958)
- 13) Mary Meigs, "Falling Between the Cracks" in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 28-38 (p.32)

- 14) Carol Smart, "Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex: The Regulation of Reproduction and Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century" in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* ed. by Carol Smart (London: Routledge, 1992), 7-32 (p.29)
- 15) Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p.522. First published *La Vieillesse* (Éditions Gallimard, 1970)
- 16) *ibid* p.536. The amendments made to this quotation draw attention to the disappointing gender bias to be found in de Beauvoir's text. Not only taking the elderly man as the social "norm" for her study (as reflected in her pronoun usage), the specific problems facing the elderly woman receive precious little attention in what is otherwise an extremely full and thorough study of the social phenomenon of old age.
- 17) Bachelard *op. cit.*, p.10
- 18) Madoff *op. cit.*, p.50
- 19) Kenneth W. Graham "Preface" *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression* ed. by Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS, 1989), i-xiii. Graham argues that "Prohibition adverts to an external state...that may take the form of cultural taboos, political constraints or domestic interdictions. Transgression points inwardly: it operates through patterns of self-assertion and self-definition..." (p.xiii)
- 20) Lynn Hunt, "The Unstable Boundaries of the French Revolution" in *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. by Michelle Perrot, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1990), 13-45 (pp.41-2)
- 21) Sue Francis, "Housing the Family" in *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment* by Matrix (London: Pluto, 1985), 81-88 (p.84). "Matrix" is defined in the Preface to this text as a collective of "feminist designers...who share a concern about the way buildings and cities work for women" (p.vii). The individual authors named as having been involved in the writing process are: Jos Boys, Frances Bradshaw, Jane Darke, Benedicte Foo, Sue Francis, Barbara McFarlane, Marion Roberts.
- 22) Matrix argues that, at the time of writing (1984), sixty per cent of households no longer conformed to the model of the traditional nuclear family upon which housing design is typically based. (p.79)
- 23) Catherine Hall, "The Sweet Delights of Home" in *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. by Michelle Perrot, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1990), 47-93 (p.74). According to Hall the census of 1851, which first documented this aspiration, is also noteworthy for being the first to add the category

"housewife" to the register. Clearly the two phenomena are not unrelated.

- 24) Michelle Perrot, "Roles and Characters" in *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. by Michelle Perrot, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1990), 167-239 (p.236) and Alain Corbin, "Intimate Relations" in *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. by Michelle Perrot, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1990), 549-613. As Corbin implies, this was the price commonly paid by the bourgeois housewife in exchange for the luxury of having a maid who, among other things, would relieve her from some of the household tasks (p.602). Once again it seems that the wife's "freedom from..." is bought at the price of the husband's "freedom to...".
- 25) See for example Bachelard op. cit., pp.xxxi-xxxv
- 26) *ibid*, p.215
- 27) *ibid*, p.224
- 28) Simon Pugh, *Garden, Nature, Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) p.129
- 29) Bonnie Zimmerman, "Lesbians Like This and That: Some Notes on Lesbian Criticism for the Nineties" in *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* ed. by Sally Munt (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1992) p.4. It should be acknowledged that Zimmerman's statement is intended primarily as a commentary upon lesbian narrative theory as a challenge to "the heterosexual economy". However, its application here (although strictly speaking out of context) remains both plausible and powerful as a more broadly based subversive stance.
- 30) Meigs, op. cit., p.37
- 31) Pugh op. cit., p.109
- 32) *ibid*, p.135
- 33) *ibid*, p.108
- 34) *ibid* p.127
- 35) Matrix op. cit., p.82
- 36) Bachelard op. cit., p.34
- 37) Gilbert and Gubar op. cit., p.37
- 38) Bland op. cit., p.41

- 39) Joanna Russ, "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think it's My Husband: The Modern Gothic" in *The Female Gothic*, ed. by Juliann E. Fleenor (Montreal: Eden Press, 1983), 31-56 (p.47)
- 40) For a full explanation of this term's theoretical application to the structures of narrative see Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1989). First published *Pour une theorie de la production litteraire* (Librairie Francois Maspero, 1966). Macherey, who conceptualises the distinction between the explicit and the implicit as one between "the manifest and the latent, the discovered and the concealed" (pp.82-3) and goes on to argue that "The speech of the book comes from a certain silence" (p.85), admirably sums up in this manner the nature of the discrepancy between the surface and underlying meanings conveyed by Edna's words here.
- 41) Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p.60
- 42) *ibid*, 11-18. Despite Tanner's parenthetical admission that "...it is almost inevitably the adulterous woman on which many nineteenth-century novels focus" (p.13), the absence of a detailed critique of this issue at this point seems a strange omission in an otherwise enlightening study.
- 43) A variety of historical sources document the discrepancy in the nature of the legal punishment invoked for male and female adultery. See for example Ursula Vogel, "Whose Property? The Double Standard of Adultery in Nineteenth-Century Law" in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* ed. by Carol Smart (London: Routledge, 1992), 147-165; Alain Corbin, "Infidelity and the Courts" in *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. by Michelle Perrot, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1990), 603-7; and James E. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society 1870-1940* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981) pp.12-17. All concur that, where a husband could only be punished for transgressions when they took place within the marital home and then only by having to pay a small fine, a wife could be liable to imprisonment irrespective of the location adopted for the transgression.
- 44) Vogel *op. cit.*, p.148
- 45) *ibid*, p.157
- 46) Tanner *op. cit.*, pp.24-7

- 47) Supplementing this description of the "Other woman", Russ argues that the male protagonists of modern Gothic narratives can be divided into two main types: "the Super-Male" and "the Shadow-Male". Whereas the latter adores and/or wishes to marry the heroine the former "treats her brusquely, derogates her, scolds her, and otherwise shows anger or contempt for her", all of which predictably (if uncomprehendingly) render him irresistibly attractive in her eyes. Russ, op. cit., pp.32-4
- 48) Macherey op. cit., p.50
- 49) Bachelard op. cit. As demonstrated by his claims that "Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (p.47) or that "Objects that are cherished...attain to a higher degree of reality than...those that are defined by geometrical reality" (p.68).
- 50) Tanner op. cit., p.32
- 51) René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1969). First published as *Mensonge romantique et verite romanesque* (Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1961), p.9
- 52) Oakley op. cit., p.234
- 53) Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1977) p.22. Cited in Elizabeth Meese, "Theorizing Lesbian: Writing - A Love Letter" in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 70-87 (p.76)
- 54) Meese op. cit., p.80
- 55) Tanner op. cit., p.100
- 56) See for example Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985). As Cameron recognises: "The contact is what matters; a woman who lies or who is silent may not lack a language, but she does not communicate" (p.5).
- 57) Graham op. cit., p.xiii
- 58) Bataille op. cit., pp.273-6
- 59) Tanner op. cit., p.97
- 60) Eugenia C. Delamotte, "Male and Female Mysteries in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'", *Legacy*, 5, 1, 1988, 3-14 (p.8)
- 61) Janice A. Radway, "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context" in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 128-134 (p.129)

- 62) Ann Barr Snitow, "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different", in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 134-40 (p.136)
- 63) Tania Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Routledge, 1985), p.64
- 64) Alison Light, "'Returning to Manderley' - Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class" in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 140-145 (p.140)
- 65) *ibid*, p.143
- 66) Cora Kaplan "The Thorn Birds: Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity" in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Routledge, 1986), p.149
- 67) Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" in *Art and Literature*, by Sigmund Freud, ed. Albert Dickson (Penguin Freud Library, 14, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 129-141 (p.137)
- 68) Kaplan *op. cit.*, p.148
- 69) Sigmund Freud "The 'Uncanny'" in *Art and Literature*, by Sigmund Freud, ed. Albert Dickson (Penguin Freud Library, 14, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 339-376. See translator's footnote (p.339).
- 70) *ibid*, p.341
- 71) Russ *op. cit.*, p.45
- 72) Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", *op. cit.*, p.367
- 73) *ibid*, p.360
- 74) Russ *op. cit.*, p.35
- 75) Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (London: Virago, 1981). In this text the unnamed protagonist's husband keeps his wife enclosed in an attic, claiming that she has lost touch with reality. The similarities with Greenwood's text which are clear even from this, are made more explicit by Delamotte *op. cit.* "...the most sinister aspect of... 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is the way the Gothic situation is initially disguised from [the protagonist]..." (p.3). Furthermore, the ambiguity of her husband's depiction means that "whatever suspicion there may be in women's Gothic that the villain is really the hero is balanced by an important complementary suspicion: the hero is really the villain" (p.5)
- 76) Graham even goes so far as to subtitle his collection of essays "Prohibition/Transgression" in illustration of this point.

- 77) Modleski op. cit., p.98
- 78) Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1978) p.179. Cited in *ibid*, p.98
- 79) Tanner op. cit., p.13
- 80) *ibid*, p.368
- 81) Girard op. cit., p.83
- 82) *ibid*, 164-5. Girard considers this the tragic but inescapable consequence of the realisation of the mediator's desires
- 83) *Evening Standard*, 22 January, 1973. Cited by Oakley op. cit., p.225
- 84) Matrix op. cit., p.9
- 85) Armstrong op. cit., p.48
- 86) Matrix, op. cit., p.1
- 87) Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy : The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.4. This statement, although written as a definition of the role of the fantastic in fiction, could be considered equally applicable to that of the housewife in her domestic setting.

CHAPTER 3 - FANTASTIC FEARS: WOMEN AND NIGHTMARE

Fear is often a distorted form of desire...A form the conscious mind finds more acceptable.¹

Theorists of the fantastic place great store upon the problematisation of internal narrative coherence through the intervention of elements that have the potential to arouse fear and horror in the reader. Frequently much of the source of disturbance resides in the fact that the reader is left unsure as to whether the disruptive and fearful elements of the text are of supernatural or psychological origin. In other words it is a strategy of narrative disturbance with which we are confronted, as well as being bombarded with plot elements which are, in themselves, fearful or horrifying on the level of content. Many of the critical studies of nightmare narratives emphasise the importance of differentiating between narratives of horror and those of terror. James B. Twitchell considers horror to be essentially a fantasy phenomenon, whereas terror is essentially a realist phenomenon, and continues:-

If we see a female victim on film being stalked by an axe-murderer...our sensation will be terror; but let that murderer be a zombie, a vampire, a werewolf, or anything akin, and our response is horror...²

Under the terms of this definition, of the four texts chosen for discussion in this chapter: Elizabeth Baines' *The Birth Machine*, Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water*, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, and Nancy Huston's *The Story of Omayya*³, Baines' and Head's are both closer to being horror

narratives, the protagonists being oppressed by elements at least some of which are of a supernatural or monstrous nature, while Frame's and Huston's are closer to being narratives of terror, the main protagonists of these texts being oppressed by all too human forces. But just as, in the previous chapter, none of the texts could simply be incorporated into the category "domestic novel", no reader would be satisfied with an unproblematic labelling of any of these four texts as either horror or terror fiction. Instead each draws on elements of horror and terror (and undeniably evokes similar emotional responses in the reader at times) not to remove us from reality but in order to challenge, disturb, and disrupt our perceptions of women's relationship with the real. In this respect Twitchell's perceptions of terror and horror's relationship with realism and fantasy respectively is also inappropriate to the texts under discussion here. In *Faces In The Water* for example, Frame does at times employ the conventional vocabulary of fantasy fiction in order to problematise and explore the fantastic realms of psychological turmoil. Thus referring to a picture of a brain that she remembers seeing, Istina compares the labelling of the drawing: "Concentration, Memory, Emotion" to "the names of cities in a strange allegorical land" (p.215) and describes another patient as:-

...living in a horror story more alarming
than any found in science-fiction
paperbacks... (FW,110)

But having said this, Istina's own nightmare and waking worlds are not always so easy either for her or the reader to differentiate between:-

On the day that I really believed...that I would be in hospital for the rest of my life, the floor of the dayroom seemed to change to layers of shifting jagged slate that cut into my feet, even through the thick gray ward socks which were soon saturated with blood seeping through upon the slates and flowing swiftly through the door, with cut-out silver and gold stars, for good conduct, floating upon it...No one noticed...(FW,166)

Rosemary Jackson⁴ has recognised that the fantastic tends to work through a combination of elements of the marvellous and the mimetic, in such a way as to draw us into an expectation of realism, only to deny that expectation by the insertion of elements which are "manifestly unreal". Istina's perceptions of the world around her are frequently couched in such a combination of terms, as the following illustrates:-

Opposite me slept Doris a tiny woman who needed to be helped into bed, it was so high for her to climb...Her sewing was the neatest I have seen, like that of the legendary small people who climb at night into the flowers and embroider the petals...Time and again, with Doris and other dwarves and patients who resembled witches or seemed inhabited by dragons, one felt like a witness to the origins of folklore... (FW,230)

One reason given for the pleasure readers and viewers derive from horror or terror fiction and films is that, although they offer the tantalising pleasure of witnessing the forcing and transgressing of prohibitions, they do so in a manner which "promises a vision which the viewer knows will be psychologically...safe"⁵. In other words the priority given to narrative closure enables the reader/viewer to retain a clear distinction between threatening and non-threatening worlds. This is another of the major distinctions between all four of these novels and such

generically classifiable forms. In all of these cases, not just does the inner (nightmare) world refuse to be retained as a separate entity, but in invading and colonising the protagonist's everyday existence it also challenges and, as we shall see transcends, the limitations of the text. So the reader is pulled, as Jackson notes, away from the familiar into a realm of "improbabilities"⁶ within which it is almost impossible to differentiate between the real and the unreal and in which we respond, not merely to what happens, but also to what might happen to us in our realities outside of the fictional world.

In the second chapter of this thesis, consideration was given to the means by which physical space operates as prohibitive territory which begs to be transgressed on the part of the domesticated woman. To this extent some degree of problematisation of the set limits between inner and outer worlds has already been established. In dealing with the subject of nightmare this takes on a further dimension. In novels which deal with fantasy purely and simply as a psychic phenomenon the "real" and the "unreal" are far less easy to differentiate between. Although it is possible to draw a distinction between the "inner" world of the psyche, and the "outer" world of so-called "empirical reality", clear differentiation between these two worlds frequently becomes blurred by transgressive means.

Thus although *Faces in the Water* is the novel which deals most closely with the notion of hallucination and insanity, physical boundaries are at times quite clearly delineated as a means by which characters' perceptions of

psychological reality are determined. As Istina Mavet, the central character, is moved between wards at Cliffhaven and Treecroft (the two mental hospitals to which she is admitted), transition between wards is perceived very clearly as transition between worlds, an entirely different set of rules seeming to govern each physical space, and entirely different types of inhabitants also being found in each. Similarly, when she climbs the boundary fence at Cliffhaven (p.170) and looks in at her fellow patients from the perspective of the outside world, boundaries between physical territory are clearly used as a means of demarcation between realms of supposed sanity and those of supposed insanity. At first glance then, it would seem that the boundaries between life "inside" and the wide world beyond are perceived as being as firmly fixed as the fantasy threshold between alternative realities in the conventional fantasy novel. But Istina's transgressive action immediately signals her as a borderland figure. The typical device whereby the central protagonist of fantasy fiction journeys beyond the physical and geographical frontiers between lands, is mirrored here by Istina's climbing of the fence and taking upon herself the role of alien outsider in looking in upon enclosed territory. But in doing so she remains marginalised by both realms. Although now "outside" the realms of institutional confinement by means of physical transgression, her psychological and social transgressiveness denies her full access to membership of the outer realm of conventional society, and renders her in their terms proper only to the inner world from which she has alienated herself. Inevitably Istina's awareness of

inner and outer blurs so that she becomes, in effect, psychologically estranged from either realm, enclosed by turmoil:-

I dreamed of the [outside] world because it seemed the accepted thing to do...[but] I could not find my way from the dream... (FW, 38)

Such confusion between the inner and the outer is also made particularly apparent in *A Question of Power*. Head, a Black South African writer, depicts a Coloured female protagonist called Elizabeth who, like Istina, is doubly alienated, this time because she is a member of a culture in which to be Coloured is to be alienated from and despised by Blacks and Whites alike. As a woman, of course, like all of these protagonists, she is further marginalised and a target for oppression. On one level we are therefore encouraged to recognise that the turmoil in Elizabeth's nightmare inner world is a microcosm of the turmoil of South Africa's nightmare outer world, a point that Head makes explicit by means of climatic comparison:-

...she spent most of the holidays of the rainy season...absorbed by the sky...the swaying swirling movements of the desert rain...Sometimes the horizon rain came sweeping over Montabeng in one enormous white-packed cumulus cloud driven by high wind and suddenly emptied itself in one violent, terrific and deafening roar over the village. It seemed to heighten and deepen the rambling labyrinth of her inner life, which, like the sky...swayed and swirled with subterranean upheavals... (QP, 61)

But also, in dealing with Elizabeth's fight against insanity, Head explicitly draws upon the use of the supernatural as a means towards psychic exploration, and in

doing so fully utilises the typical ambivalence of the fantastic. Todorov's concept of hesitancy is particularly appropriate to readings of the supernatural for, as Noel Carroll comments, such texts:-

...[support] two alternative readings: a supernatural one and a naturalistic one - the latter explaining the anomalous events...psychologically; the former accepting those events as real. The astute reader realizes that neither of these interpretations is conclusive, and therefore vacillates or hesitates between them.⁷

That Head explicitly adopts such Todorovian techniques seems superficially ironic when considered that Todorov himself has been charged with an academic elitism that refuses to endorse "the talk of the black idiom"⁸. In speaking Todorov's language at the apparent expense of her own (the entire narrative shunning any use of Black dialects), one might be tempted to wonder how far Head is turning her back upon a Blackwoman's⁹ mind and worldview. But of course her strategy is more devious than this implies. Precisely by adopting the transgressive device of the fantastic to locate a precarious narrative positionality situated at the meeting-point of boundaries where horror, racial politics and gender politics all interplay with the tortuous workings of the psyche; Head's writing very clearly falls within what Sarah Lefanu has referred to as the "shadowland" so frequently explored by the politicised woman writer pushing towards the horror end of the fantasy spectrum¹⁰.

As part of the general confusion Elizabeth's nightmares gradually encroach upon her waking reality until she too is quite incapable of differentiating between them:-

She couldn't even begin to say: 'Well, you know Sello, don't you? He isn't all he seems to be on the surface...He's really Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde...And you know what sort of a world I live in? It's midnight all the time...I'd not taken note of real living people because so many fantastic images surround me, and they talk and move all the time... (QP,57-8)

and yet her discourse here clearly demonstrates her awareness that at some point she is moving into the realms of the fantastic as much as she is into psychological disintegration. Twitchell's statement that "In horror art we are transported to the threshold, to the margin, to the crest"¹¹ seems to be borne out by Elizabeth's son Shorty's fears that his mother's propensity towards transgressive territory is threatening to his own well-being:-

I'm afraid of the edge...I think a lot of things have fallen off the edge...My mother says once they fall off they just keep on falling and falling because there is no bottom. I can never go far away from home in case I fall off too. (QP,95)¹²

But it is not simply the blurring of boundaries between worlds that has such a disturbing effect upon the reading process. As already noted, in his essay on "The 'Uncanny'" Freud devotes considerable space to a discussion of the role of defamiliarisation as a means by which fear can be evoked. From this perspective the transgression of apparently stable boundaries in the form of outlines can also operate as a chilling phenomenon with implications for the characters' perceptions of the reality around them. In Elizabeth Baines' *The Birth Machine*, in typical nightmare style, seemingly everyday events exude disturbing suggestions as physical distortions function to communicate psychological distress:-

Outside the wind was getting stronger, blowing distorted sounds through the telegraph wires. Their shadows loomed ...one straight and thin, the other curved and fat. Jack Sprat and his wife. (BM,53)

As outlines and environments start to blur and proportions to shift, dimensions necessarily begin to alter, something that Frame's protagonist also recognises as apparently solid surfaces begin to waver and the physical characteristics of those around her take on nightmare proportions. Jennifer Waelti-Walters, even in the context of one of the most apparently conformist of fantasy genres, recognises that:-

It is through a physical sense of oneself and one's own boundaries that one achieves a measure of the *outside world*, and without such a measure one can neither be aware of nor articulate one's situation and status.¹³

It is a commonplace throughout the fantasy spectrum for characters to feel oppressed and imprisoned by shrinking rooms and diminishing space, an issue that takes on both physical and psychological dimensions in these texts. Thus Elizabeth, visiting the mental hospital where her mother had been incarcerated, takes note of the "very high wall surrounding the building" (pp.17-18); but far more fearful for reader and protagonist alike are her hallucinatory experiences which, in mirroring "the surface reality of African society...[are] shut in and exclusive" (p.38).

All four central protagonists are also "penned" into an exclusory environment through being institutionalised for at least part of the respective narratives within asylums or other medical establishments. This type of enclosure symbolism also, of course, operates on a psychic level as a

manifestation of the mental repression suffered. Istina Mavet's "secret rule", for example, in an institution in which inmates are as enclosed by rules and regulations as they are by locked doors and windows, is a self-inflicted one, and one to which she clings in the hope of retaining her sanity: "I forbid you Istina Mavet to panic in a small locked room" (p.203). In this text Virginia Woolf's supposedly liberating concept of "a room of one's own"¹⁴ is transformed into an image of terror as Istina notes that the very phrase "single room" instils fear into her mind (p.39). To this end, in Frame's novel patients are to be found pummelling walls (p.119), not as a means to transgress institutional limits, but to break free from psychological constraint. So Istina, in trying to smash a window pane, does so in order to escape the ultimate in psychic enclosure, EST, through which the "room of one's own" which exists within one's head is invaded and colonised by the authorities.

Psychoanalysis shares with the fantastic its preoccupation with the "mysterious" territory which forms the site of the "transactions between private and public realms"¹⁵. That Freudian analysis has traditionally associated repression within the psyche with oppression from within the body alerts us to the third dimension of the links being made in these texts by means of the fantastic. At least in part, all of these women are made to feel psychologically repressed through the physical constraints imposed upon their own bodies. Elizabeth's sense of enclosure usually manifests itself psychologically as an intense claustrophobia originating from oppression by

nightmare powers. Sometimes this takes on a tangible form, such as when she feels herself forced into a sack by Sello (p.39), but at others the origins for this are unknown, and she is simply aware of a force which leaves her choking and paralyses her limbs. At all times, however, the effects of this claustrophobia are experienced anatomically, as the recurring symptoms of choking and suffocation illustrate.

As the narrative of *The Birth Machine* opens, we find Zelda lying in a hospital corridor, shivering. Later this image recurs, our awareness of the enclosing structures of the hospital building growing all the time, reaching their climax in a reference to Zelda being "strapped to her bed" (p.21) while the nursing sister takes a tea break. At the start of the novel this awareness of enclosure is reinforced physically by the restricted view Zelda is given of the outer world, necessitated by her entry into this inner world of the institution. Almost immediately however, these physical enclosures begin to encroach upon her anatomy, as the hospital structure itself begins to metamorphose into a macrocosm of the human body:-

...cold metal inside her...a sense of everything pinched together: her womb, her guts, her knotted spine...a tight band around her abdomen...Two nurses in waxy brown come in through rubber side-doors that yield like flaps of skin... lift doors. The porter peels them aside. The small ceiling blinks...the lift walls throb and hum. (BM,9)

One could be forgiven for assuming that this awareness of Zelda as a body within a body is to be interpreted positively as a womb within a womb. Just as the baby is protected and nourished by Zelda's body so, we might argue,

Zelda is protected and nourished by the expertise of the hospital staff. However, Zelda's experience of this enclosure is far from positive. As the narrative progresses we learn that her experience of being treated by doctors and clinicians has been one of fear and alienation throughout, typified by the fateful visit to the clinic where the seeds of her fears are first sown. At this point we recognise how quickly physical and anatomical enclosure translates itself into psychological form as Zelda is really enclosed by a sense of insecurity and inadequacy. As an extension of this an implied pun emerges in this and Huston's text based on the visual and mental implications of the term "examination". Confronted by a series of apparently locked doors, Zelda's first examination (test) is to work out how to gain access to the inner sanctum of the examination (inspection) room. Such symbols of domestic enclosure recur in the work of women writers, as has already been noted, but in the literature of nightmare it is the "labyrinthine corridors of repression"¹⁶ that are most commonly explored. From this perspective it is interesting to note that these novels are also particularly preoccupied with the image of the corridor, an image which, from a gendered perspective, obviously transforms textual descriptions of the vagina into nightmare passages. In one of the more common nightmare sequences which recur in Omayya's mind she is late for a written examination, rushing through the underground network in order to reach the venue on time. Reaching the top of an escalator she finds:-

...corridors extend as far as the eye can see, their walls are splashed with naked women... (SO,13)

In an image clearly taken from the sub-genre of the "splatter film"¹⁷ these corridors, we note, are not referred to as being splashed with *images* of women, but with the women themselves. It is as if their very bodies have been smashed against the walls, covering them with the blood and other bodily secretions associated with the woman's body and, in the process, displaying them for "examination". From this perspective the relationship between enclosure and anatomy becomes one of inherent violence - typically, violence aimed against women by men, but ultimately perpetuated by women's inability to break out of the limits of this "vicious circle" through which these women's bodies, minds and realities are defined.

The Woman as Wounded Space

The encircling of these women by their own psychological and anatomical nightmares results in one of the recurring motifs in these texts being that of the wound (anatomical and psychological) and its manifold implications for the psychoanalytic positioning of the feminine within Occidental cultures. Angela Carter's claim¹⁸ that women intrinsically inhabit a wounded space for which the menstrual blood flood becomes a metaphorical manifestation, explains the proliferation of the images of blood and other fluids found within these texts. That fluidity is essentially linked with cultural representations of women is made clear by Klaus Theweleit, who comments that:-

A river without end...flows through the world's literature...the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water...woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling body fluids; the vagina...as a dark place ringed with Pacific ridges; love as the foam from the collision of two waves...¹⁹

From this perspective water mixes with blood in conveying the relationship between woman and the nightmare realm. That both are equally associated with life and death in this way is perhaps not inconsequential. We need look no further than the title of Frame's novel to recognize the emphasis that is placed here upon the importance of water imagery as a device for exploring a submergence into a nightmare world from which we strive to separate ourselves in order to stay "sane":-

We all see the faces in the water. We smother our memory of them, even our belief in their reality, and become calm people of the world...Sometimes by a trick of circumstances or dream or a hostile neighbourhood of light we see our own face. (FW,150)

In an ironic reversal of the expectation that water as an "acceptable" fluid might be seen to stand in for blood as a taboo fluid, references to physical wounding are used at times quite explicitly to imply psychological and emotional wounding. Istina hoards used sanitary towels in her dressing table at home, filling her room with the stench of blood; whilst Totty, an adolescent inmate, works out her total lack of control over her own anatomy through an obsessive and tortured drive towards masturbation. The obvious guilt instilled into the latter by the authorities, accompanied by the blood that pours from her orifice "for she was

menstruating" (p.169), combine to provide us with another manifestation of the woman's genitalia as a gaping wound. But perhaps the real terror lies not with the presence of blood, but in the futility of searching to heal invisible wounds. After all, this novel demonstrates unequivocally the fact that the rape of the mind is as damaging and difficult to heal as the rape of the body:-

Suck the snake bite from the wound...The streets throng with people who panic, looking to the left and the right, covering the scissors, sucking poison from a wound they cannot find...where is the Red Cross God with the ointment and plaster the needle and thread and the clean linen bandages to mummify our festering dreams? (FW,9-10)

The culmination of this doubly wounded state is located in the scarring (both physical and mental) inflicted by the use of EST which will result in Istina's "old self" being "spilled somewhere like an invisible stain" (p.217). From this perspective the references to staining which accompany those of wounds and which Istina describes at one point as "a color of stagnancy spreading from inside and rising to the surface of the skin" (p.113), typify the two-pronged assault upon the woman's mind and body by this nightmare world.

This inherent link between fluidity and fear is taken a stage further in Baines' novel through association with the tale of "Briar Rose". That the fish of the fairy-tale narrative emerges out of the depths to pronounce judgement, doom and foreboding transforms the water itself into an "unreal" and threatening world of its own. In the following passage, in which Zelda exemplifies Theweleit's "woman-in-

the-water", what begins as a wish-fulfilment fantasy of being able to enter her own womb and caress her child, both of them bathing in the amniotic fluid together, is transformed by the presence of fluidity into a nightmare confrontation with monstrosity:-

The water steeps, meets above her...warm sphere, two eyes, nestled to her rib-cage...Something knocks them in the darkness...What is that nudging?...Something bird-like, a reptile. An underwater lizard. The face opens and grins. Not that. She thrashes up, up and out... (BM,97)

That patriarchal relationships with fluidity are very different to this is also made clear. Unlike Zelda, Roland welcomes the submergence into an underwater world as a pleasurable means of evading reality, his relationship with fantasy being very different to Zelda's. Requiring his attention about a matter to do with her pregnancy:-

She watched him swim up out of his preoccupation, grapple, flounder...His face sharpened; he came back up to the everyday world. (BM,43)

Only when flooded by his tears of desolation can Zelda respond positively to the issue of submergence, her sexual arousal necessitating his confrontation with nightmare possibilities and enabling a transformation in which:-

...she too became flesh that could weep...Her body unfolded in widening spaces, endless space he could enter...(BM,90)

Throughout this text Zelda is submerged by fluids imposed upon her by patriarchal representatives, connected up to more and more drips and catheters. At the same time, however, and unlike in *Faces in the Water*, there does seem

to be a resistance to any acknowledgement of the woman's body as a flooding rather than a drowning entity. Zelda, projecting through fantasy a vision of herself upon the operating table considers: "There must be blood. But [she] can't see, over the mound..." (p.76). As Chris Turner and Erica Carter acknowledge, it is:-

The "concrete" (and not merely "fantasized") bodily flows...[that] are the source of antagonistic currents of pleasure and unpleasure...²⁰

in the patriarchal body in general. As is commonly known, from the Old Testament onwards, the shedding of blood (by women in particular) has been perceived as an unclean process by which the bleeding woman is transformed herself into an embodiment of horror and festering flesh. In this respect Zelda's own body operates as a censoring mechanism through fantasy here, preventing the display of the unclean fluid, forced into a state of complicity by means of anaesthesia. In Head's narrative, no such reticence is shown, and bodily fluids saturate the text in a manner that is painfully explicit.

That a demonic female sexuality is one of the prevailing topics of horror narratives²¹ is perhaps not surprising, considering that so many theorists have seen such fiction as the cathartic expression of repressed socio-cultural fears and taboos. Theweleit's study of the transgressive fantasies of the *Freikorps*²² analyses the recurrent motifs of the horror fictions framed by these men. Like Carter, he emphasises the centrality of the wound image in his study, referring to masculinist fears that "The wound

into which the woman is transformed" is a "castration wound"²³. In Head's narrative this is given explicit treatment through the nightmare manifestations of masculine fears of failing to "stand up" to the superior sexual prowess of the *fantastic* woman:-

As she closed her eyes all these Coloured men lay down on their backs, their penes in the air, and began to die slowly. Some of them who could not endure these slow deaths simply toppled over into rivers and drowned, Medusa's mocking smile towering over them all. (QP,45)

It is in response to the power of such fears that Theweleit documents a variety of fantastic and real atrocities inflicted upon women in response to the terror evoked by their assertiveness and the horror provoked by their perceived bestiality. It is interesting that *A Question of Power*, although written prior to Theweleit's study, repeatedly parallels his argument in the manner in which Head fictionalises such nightmare brutality:-

Pelican-Beak was too pushy...He broke her legs, he broke her jutting spindly elbows...Out of her breasts which were small, round and hard, he forced a black slime...Then he decided that [she] was too dangerous; she'd better quiet down totally. He'd redesign her pelvis area along the lines of Elizabeth's, which was extraordinarily passive...There, sure enough, at Elizabeth's side appeared a feminine pelvis with passive legs, nearly a replica of Elizabeth's. Poor Pelican-Beak had her own slashed off and was fitted out with a new pelvis. (QP,167-8)²⁴

Significantly, three areas of the woman's body form the foci for this destructive act: the breasts, the pelvis and (it is implied) the mouth. In dismembering her breasts and pelvis Dan attacks her ability to reproduce (for) herself, an act

which paradoxically asserts the active presence of the woman as a source of life, nourishment and creativity. In attempting to silence her through passivity Dan also (albeit indirectly) aims a blow at her mouth. Both Carter and Theweleit recognise the significance of the implied relationship between the mouth and the vagina (a relationship which takes on added proximity from the lips which shield both orifices), but Rosalind Coward goes even further in claiming that:-

...the mouth seems to be woman's...most intimate orifice...Source of gratifications, illicit and delicious intimacies, the organ of confession, the mouth is strangely crossed by the structures of eroticism and prohibition which touch on women...Is it that...lipstick has condensed the eroticisms and the prohibitions around the mouth? For blood on a woman's orifice reminds me of another orifice which bleeds.²⁵

In explicitly attacking her "beak", the silencing of one orifice here undoubtedly functions as an implied (and far more ferocious) attempt to render another impotent, for it is the vagina which is the real source of threat, a space too horrifying to confront. Although Carter claims that:-

...[woman's] symbolic value is primarily that of...a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled...²⁶

we know that it is not an engulfing by the mouth which Dan fears, teeth or no teeth. After all, as Head informs us, the name "Pelican-Beak" itself refers to "her passageway, which was long and tough like the bird's beak" (p.167). According to Theweleit, engulfment by the woman's body is a fear right at the root of the destructive fantasies and actions of the *Freikorps* and one, in line with Coward's speculation, which

targets the mouth as the pivotal focus of the woman's body as wounded space:-

'Mouth' : a woman is punched in the mouth; she is clubbed in the teeth with a rifle butt; a slot is fired into her open mouth. The mouth appears as a source of nauseating evil. It is 'that venomous hole' that spouts out a 'rain of spittle'...[So] Mouths can symbolically represent the vagina, and the spittle pouring out of them, its secretions.²⁷

Thus, when Istina Mavet refers to:-

...a taste in my mouth of musty cloth and I am picking at the sore on my hand that grows a scab each day like the cover of a well with myself oozing out of it... (FW,118)

the combination of the well image (which is surely a displaced reference to the vagina) alongside the reference to oozing fluids is suggestive of the whole of the woman's body as a space in need of healing, sealing and cleansing.

That slime is another central image of the horror form once again reminds us of the latter's repressive concerns. In her Foreword to Theweleit's analysis, Barbara Ehrenreich refers to male perceptions of women's bodies as "holes, swamps, pits of muck that can engulf"²⁸. In *A Question of Power*, by means of an horrific metonymy mirrored by Theweleit's own study, characters such as Madame Squelch Squelch and Miss Body Beautiful (whose orgasm is like "a small child wetting her pants" over Elizabeth (p.164)) demonstrate how masculinist fantasies of sexually active women are equally permeated by swamps of slime and filth which transform the secretions of the vagina, through nightmare, into frighteningly contagious festering tissue:-

The flesh of [Miss Body Beautiful's] private parts had a raw, red look as though the surface skin had been rubbed off by many hands. (QP,164)

In typical patriarchal mode, if the engulfing of the phallus symbolises a temporary victory of the monstrous female over masculine sexuality, then only by combating fluidity with fluidity, can patriarchy hope to stem the flow and counteract the effect:-

[Dan] had in his hands a holy-water sprinkler such as the Roman Catholic priests use during high mass, and he solemnly raised the sprinkler and waved it around...Some of the cool drops fell on Elizabeth. She could feel them like icy drops on her feverish body and soul. That was supposed to heal her. (QP, 146)

Patriarchal fears aside, Elizabeth undoubtedly is in need of healing, for when she skids on the slime of female mutilation herself (p.116), we remember that her relationship with the fantastic is not only defined by a tormented obscenity that all too frequently takes on a damaged and damaging female form, but that it equally frequently manifests itself as negatively overt female arousal intent upon the reduction of women themselves:-

...[Medusa] sprawled her legs in the air, and the most exquisite sensation travelled out of her towards Elizabeth. It enveloped Elizabeth from head to toe like a slow, deep, sensuous bomb. It was like falling into deep, warm waters... 'You haven't got anything near that, have you?' (QP,44)

The ultimate horror of Elizabeth's nightmare world lies of course in its very creation, for unlike Theweleit's analysis, her horror narrative is a projection of a female mind turned in upon itself.

Obviously playing on the reader's awareness of Pauline Réage's nightmare narrative *The Story of O*²⁹, the title of Huston's novel alerts us to the terrifying implications of a woman's mind and body turned in upon itself, for if Omayya is O³⁰ then so is she Anna O, Freud's first and most famous published case history³¹. In Réage's work the woman's genitals operate implicitly as a literal embodiment of woman's vulnerability in a phallogentric society, a symbolic association the political implications of which are made rather more explicit in *The Story of Omayya*. Omayya is born by caesarian section, a birthing which recurs throughout the novel as a traumatic awareness of being torn from a bloody wound. Like O, the name "Omayya" is repeatedly brought to mind as a name foregrounding the presence of such gaping holes which, through Freudian means, are presences ironically transformed into absences, the woman being located within a negative "space" in contrast to the positive masculine "pole". In this way Omayya (like O), is simultaneously named "Everywoman" but also "no-person" defined as she is by lack. The implications of this are that, through the body, women are invalidated as no-bodies anatomy (which should function as a positive signifier) actually operating as a negative signifier. In this manner the rapists conflate fantasy and reality in transforming Omayya's vaginal opening into a gaping physical and psychological wound as her nightmarish recounting of events makes all too clear. In this respect, in invading her bodily space just as nightmare fantasies come to invade her waking reality, Omayya becomes the epitome of Carter's "essentially" wounded woman.

But if the woman herself is a wounded space it is not simply caesarian but "natural" birthing which necessitates the female characters found in these texts having to withstand the embodiment of guilt deriving from an awareness that the ability to give birth is simply the infliction of mutilation and monstrosity upon innocent children. As noted already, Head's character Elizabeth is the offspring of parents of mixed race, her mother being white and her father a black stable-boy. As a child, Elizabeth is told:-

Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother...They had to lock her up as she was having a child... (QP,16)

So Elizabeth learns, not just that she is an inheritor of a wound which brands the skin and taints her own relationship with reality, but that her own birthing was the cause of her mother's incarceration and ultimate destruction, women being trapped in a vicious circle of reproduction as imprisonment. Both Frame and Huston use a very similar association between birthing and wounding in their respective narratives. In Frame's text there is a repeated and rather surreal reference to Istina's mother "Bailing the blood from her enormous shoes" (p.131) as if there is some implied link between Istina's nightmare existence and a sense of maternal culpability. In addition, Frame also introduces us to a minor character Carol, another of the many diminutive women in this novel who, in referring to her origins claims "I'm jitimate. My mother had me before she married. She didn't want me to grow" (p.149). Once again a clear link is being made between an awareness of guilt on her mother's part (in this case induced by societal convention) and emotional

wounding on Carol's part which appears to manifest itself in physical form. In Huston's text this issue is also explored through what S.S. Praver considers to be one of the fears most frequently played upon within nightmare narratives, a claustrophobia which finds its ultimate expression in the dread of premature burial³². Omayya, dreaming that she and Saroyan are parents to a small daughter, fantasises that they are given the choice of putting their child to death through burial alive. Both agree to this option and watch the ceremony, at the end of which the gravedigger "sprinkles a handful of sulphate on the baby's body so it will consume itself once buried" (p.107). After this, however, Omayya repents of her decision, and she and Saroyan plead with the gravedigger to unearth their child's body:-

...they inform us that the baby hasn't died yet, it might survive, only...'the sulphate has already started to burn its chest...it's left a wound...'...'They ask me to guess the shape of the wound ...It's in the shape of a letter...It was in the shape...of an O.'
(SO,107)

This nightmare within a nightmare, with its inescapable overtones of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*³³ alerts us to the awareness that Omayya's baby, unlike Hester Prynne's, will be no beautiful Pearl who will emerge out of the enclosure of the shell gleaming and milky white, but a child scarred and stained by guilt, Omayya having passed on to her the awareness of wounding which she has herself inherited. That Omayya's own birthing is seen as a mutual mutilation between mother and child leads to Cybele's association within Omayya's psyche with blade and scissor imagery (implying the power to mutilate)³⁴. So we see that

women's creativity is frustrated or prevented from attaining its full potential through the intervention of various manifestations of patriarchal authority (here in the sense of medical technology). Although others may dupe us with claims that "Everything tends towards roundness, towards the perfection of the circle" (SO,18), many women writers have recognised in contrast to this, that the only patriarchal concept of female "perfection" within the body is death within the body of the text. In keeping with this, *The Story of Omya* is littered with implied references to real women writers and artists who have "killed themselves into art", among them Sylvia Plath (pp.30-31), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (p.40) and Mary Wollstonecraft (p.43). The narrative is laced with images of self-mutilation, bodies dismembering or imploding, and women "giving themselves up to the waves" which will drown and destroy them.

But it is in Head's novel that we have perhaps the most extensive treatment of this theme of mutilation through creativity, the belief in maternity as monstrosity being rendered explicit through a variety of fantastic projections³⁵. Even Mrs Jones, a rather sanctimonious but well-intentioned old woman in Elizabeth's village, is transformed by the voice of Dan into a *grandame* of vice and obscenity:-

She's not all she seems to be on the surface...Even prostitutes had to have mothers. She was the origin of his nice-time girls. Her symbol was that of a broody hen sitting on a clutch of bad eggs. Like Sello, she rose on the horizon like a monstrous cackling old witch. (QP,171)

But Elizabeth is also implicated by this. Having dreamt of Sello driving off into the bush and moving to attack a child, she hears on the radio of the "real" death of a "real" child. Her sense of maternal monstrosity derives in part from the awareness that while she is horrified by the incident itself, she is also implicated by her belief that the reality of the act has evolved out of the fantasy of her dream. Jane Gallop asks the question "Who is the monster? The mother or the self?" continuing:-

The inability to answer that urgent question is certainly tied to the difficulty in separating mother from self...the monster is that difficulty.³⁶

From this perspective Noel Carroll makes some particularly interesting points about the transgressive function and depiction of monster-types which have bearing upon the depiction of maternity in both this text and *The Birth Machine*. Clear similarities exist between both novels in this respect. Both Elizabeth and Zelda fight to retain their sanity in the face of mounting anxiety and stress. Both are also trapped between two dubious deities: Elizabeth being caught between Dan and Sello (both oscillating between roles of God and the Devil); and Zelda being caught between the chief consultant in his role of Almighty God and her own husband in his of God the Father. The Professor, in pioneering a use of clinical induction which seeks to remove all autonomy from the expectant mother, monstrosly perverts female creativity:-

"What we have here...is the simple process of putting two and two together - or rather, even more simply, one and one: a uniparous birth to the mother of this invention." The audience titters. (BM,114)

In this respect he is a Frankenstein figure whose desire for fame, as the title of the novel implies, involves the transformation of Zelda into a monster of "categorical transgression"³⁷. Differentiating between monsters of fusion and those of fission, Carroll classifies the former as that type of monster in which "categorically contradictory elements are fused or condensed or superimposed in one unified spatio-temporal being". Through the "fusion" of flesh and machine properties this is the type of maternal monstrosity found in Baines' narrative³⁸.

In Head's text Elizabeth is seen to give birth to a monster who, like Frankenstein's creation, will destroy the child, the mother being once more unwittingly implicated in the perpetuation of terror:-

A filament-like umbilical cord appeared. Attached to its other end was Sello. The filament glowed with an incandescent light. As she looked at it, it parted in the middle, shrivelled and died. The huge satanic image of Sello opened its swollen, depraved mouth in one long scream. (QP,140)

But in this "satanic image" manifesting itself as an infantile figure, it is actually himself that Sello will turn against in lashing out at childhood "innocence". This depiction of Sello as Elizabeth's alter-ego likewise reinforces the stance of maternity as monstrosity, this time of the "fission" variety in which the combination of elements is split over more than one being, leading to a

complex interrelationship between possessor and possessee which finally problematises absolute notions of monster and victim. Certainly, although apparently victim to her own nightmares, in giving birth to a demon Elizabeth's active participation once again defines her as categorically transgressive, a point that reinforces Carroll's belief that horror monsters:-

...are not only ontologically transgressive.
Most often they also do morally transgressive
things.³⁹

So birthing comes to be associated, not merely with wounding but with death rather than life. From this perspective, it is useful to consider the image offered by Shorty in recounting his witnessing of the body of a dead dog: "It was lying on one side with a big hole in its stomach. I don't like to die" (p. 179). The gaping wound which symbolises the death of the animal is more commonly associated, as noted above, with the female genitalia. From this perspective, the dead dog manifests itself as a displaced image of vaginal destructiveness, and birthing as assimilation into a state of death.

But it is not just female creativity in the form of birthing that is perceived as a nightmare device. Elizabeth, tormented by manifestations of horror, is faced by Dan parading in front of her his seventy-two "nice-time girls", each of whom, as implied above, will perform with him in a seemingly endless orgy of obscenity, flaunting their fluids and bodies in her face. But what appears so significant about these women are their names and symbols, several of which: The Womb, Miss Sewing-Machine, Miss Pink Sugar-Icing

and Miss Body Beautiful (whose symbol is a chocolate cake) seem to represent various forms of traditional female creativity: childbirth, dressmaking and cookery respectively. It goes without saying, however, that in none of these cases is their supposed creativity given genuine expression. Instead, these names and symbols represent a reductive and destruction sexual expertise: Miss Sewing Machine, for example, taking her name from the fact that "She can go with a man the whole night and feel no ill-effects the next day..." (p.127). Dan's horror of genuine female creativity becomes increasingly apparent. Thus, from his perspective "The Womb" has to be artificially adorned with Elizabeth's brightly-coloured clothing before she can be considered a symbol of "creativity and vitality" (p.165) and her contractions, rather than being linked with the production of children, are employed purely for Dan's sexual arousal. But this travesty of female creativity goes beyond this, Dan actually aping the birth process in his construction of a mannequin version of Elizabeth, whose creation will actually result in the latter's redundancy:-

...he had a masterpiece of his own to produce...she could see him wiping up the legs a bit because they were too dirty. Then supposedly, since he was God, he breathed into it the breath of life. The model stood up and turned to face Elizabeth. They were identical replicas except that what stood before Elizabeth was a demon of sensuousness... Her legs were so weak she could hardly stand on them. (QP,192-3)

This passage, playing on the dual senses of the word "model", emphasises that women such as Body Beautiful are merely safe and sterile versions of the dangerously creative woman. That this puppet is, ironically, the fantasy creation

of a fantasy creation (Dan being a figment of Elizabeth's imagination) in no way reduces the power it has to intimidate Elizabeth, just as destructive masculinist fantasies of "the perfect woman" can serve to intimidate women in the real world. As Wendy Chapkis observes:-

Whatever the current borders of beauty, they will always be well-defined and exceedingly narrow, and it will be woman's task to conform to them - for as long as is humanly possible.⁴⁰

Like the false creativity of the "nice-time girls" Dan's creativity in the above-mentioned passage is also of course false, precisely because his real masturbatory fantasy is neither the creation nor the adoration of women, but their destruction and mutilation:-

He hacked [Elizabeth] to death between blackouts. She had no defence. She simply lay there falling into death. The joy and ecstasy for him was the piecemeal job he was doing...It was most probably his major sexual erection; he attacked her head the way he had attacked the vaginas of the nice-time girls he'd displayed before her for a whole year. (QP,180)

Although *The Birth Machine* is undoubtedly a full-length fictional treatment of such womb envy as terrifying psychological torment, once again it is not just birthing itself that is thus implicated. Initially Zelda's perceptions of her own creativity take us back to "the perfection of the circle", and are positively defined through references to her "round, fruity belly" as the real life-force. But once she hears that another woman may have a problem with her pregnancy, she fears that a similar fate may befall her own:-

What insidious flaw can grow inside round
fruity bellies...What wisdom allows [the
doctor] to distinguish so finely...the truly
ripe moment when a visit to a flower-show
would be no longer safe? As it is, tomorrow
the woman will be there, amongst the clotted
banks of flowers...garnered at the very
subtle point when they're most ripely blown.
(BM,40-41)

This scene is significant for two reasons. Firstly, as with the pregnancy itself, once the source of the fear has penetrated into Zelda's mind/body, she is unable to get rid of it and it grows and grows. Secondly, the connection made between the woman and the visit to the flower-show sets up a link which is pursued throughout the text, and which resides in the connection between pregnancy and other forms of creativity, an association frequently explored by means of the metaphorical association between the female body and vegetable and food imagery. Like Olive in the previous chapter, one of the creative means which heralds Zelda's nightmare experience is her increasing lack of success with cookery. The problem here, however, is also seen to reflect upon her own body:-

She picked up a swede, icy-cold, buried all
winter and yanked that morning from the
hardened soil. She began to peel it. Her
knife stuck on a knot, a place where the
tense yellow flesh had gone woody... She was
suddenly terribly, desperately afraid...
(BM,44)

a fear which cannot be concealed by the end-product:-

A piece of undercooked carrot caught in her
throat...she thought most likely she'd been
wrong with her timing - also, there was
something lacking in the swede ...They
scraped their plates in silence. She felt
deflated, not relieved. (BM,52-3)

In a novel where roundness and swelling is perceived so positively, Zelda's state of deflation here is quite clearly a manifestation of (figurative if not literal) sterility. That both forms of creativity are inseparably linked is also made clear through the introduction of the subject of timing, which has implications for the progress of the developing foetus and arouses suspicions in Zelda's mind that her body may be inadequate as a time-piece. All of these associative links imply an ambiguity that unnerves the reader as much as it torments Zelda.

Huston's text, in reworking the earlier "splatter" scene, also demonstrates the manner in which a variety of forms of female creativity can take on nightmare associations through the implied association with the woman's body:-

In some of the other rooms, women have stuck up posters on the walls...or else, more rarely, sketches and watercolours of their own. The walls look even barer that way. Gaping souls, flayed souls. The day I arrived at the Castle, there was a painting of Lorna's hanging on the wall. Lorna is doing much better...she's painting, she's showing more of herself. And when they found the painting stuffed behind the radiator: Lorna's not doing so well these days - she's hiding, she's withdrawn. (SO,39-40)

Lorna, like Zelda, refuses to constrain her creativity within conformist means, the double-bind within which this traps her becoming immediately apparent:-

A day is perhaps
Infinity
Full stop: that is all.
(SO,42)

Whilst Lorna may be creative, the self-imposed silence which censors this poem mirrors the means via which the patriarchal establishment quickly retaliates against the assertive and genuinely creative woman. When the analyst asks Omayya:-

What about if we put the ink into the needle?
And if the needle thrusts beneath the skin
and ejects its liquid - what would you call
that?... (SO,86)

her response: "A tattoo. Or if you prefer: a sentimental novel" (SO,86) demonstrates the manner in which she acknowledges conformist female creativity to be filtered through the all-censoring phallic pen (here implied by the hyperdermic sedative). Thus the female writer of consolationist fiction merely poses as a creative woman whilst, in reality, she reinforces patriarchal fantasies. In either case her artistry becomes confined or, at best, usurped for superior patriarchal purposes (as sewing is seen to be by the doctors in *The Birth Machine*).

In *Faces in the Water* similar superficial encouragements are given to female creativity through the media of sewing, tapestry, embroidery and painting. Always, however, such pastimes are used by the medical staff as mocking control mechanisms and placebos rather than genuine attempts to encourage the patients to use and expand their imaginative powers. On first seeing the midget woman in Ward Four-Five-and-One at Treecroft, Istina immediately recognises her to be a long-stay (indeed institutionalised) patient:-

...from the intricacy of the pattern and the care with which it was being followed...I had seen it before, at Cliffhaven, this needling of their whole life into a piece of fancywork - a dressing-table cover, caddy, tablecloth; with no hope of ever seeing it in their own home, on their own furniture. (FW,82-3)

Particularly cruel are the insidious means by which Istina's creative hopes are raised by Dr. Trace. Duping her with promises of bringing her pictures around which to weave narratives, he poses at first as a symbol of hope upon which she waits for a time, before realising that his promise is meaningless. Shoshana Felman has argued that:-

...quite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation.⁴¹

But surely Frame proves her wrong. Istina is in this respect the embodiment of Gilbert and Gubar's plotting/scheming creative madwoman⁴² and to this extent part of her rebellion resides in her refusal to comply with the pseudo-creative forms on offer. Instead of making trinkets, toys, or redundant domestic decorations, Istina prefers to:-

...sit and watch the sunlight and the shadows of the people moving in and out of the open door, and the skeins of light weaving themselves into the warm colors of the materials at the looms.(FW,227)

In the drab darkness of the nightmare world the desire for colour and creativity in these women's lives is without dispute. As Frame's narrator tells us, whilst windows might be smashed and walls daubed with stains as a result of patients' frustrated outbursts, paintings and flowers remain safe, as relics of hope. But Istina's attitude is more

hopeful still. While, through the fantastic, the creative powers of all three of the other central protagonists are transformed through nightmare into fearful constraints, Istina's psychological world provides a glimmer of positive creativity that just might hold empirical sterility at bay.

Childhood Nightmares and the Transgression of the Taboo

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, differentiating between the surface and underlying relationship between desire and a psychoanalytic understanding of fantasy, observes:-

We pursue objects which sustain our fantasies, but the origins of FANTASY... are unknown and can only ever be encountered as a boundary beyond which nothing can be said.⁴³

When translated from a state of wish-fulfilment into one of fear, the surface manifestation of this (in the form of the sustaining objects) could well be considered those aspects to which Freud assigns uncanny status. That Ragland-Sullivan once again expresses this distinction by means of the prohibitive limit which fantasy drives to transgress and which is, indeed, transgressed in these novels by means of the literary *fantastic*, is once again significant. Although the origins of all four central protagonists' nightmares do remain unarticulated on an explicit level, the power of the "unsaid", when translated from the terms of Ragland-Sullivan's definition into the terms of either Macherey's or Jackson's, communicates very effectively the fact that all have their roots within childhood associations (something Freud also considered to be a central feature of the power of the uncanny). In the case of Elizabeth, Omayya and Zelda

this connection is made clear by means of the imagery of death and mutilation:-

Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist...all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them⁴⁴.

In *The Birth Machine*, Zelda and her childhood friend Hilary discover the skull of a dead boy in their den, but refuse to articulate any knowledge of the incident to the authorities concerned, a "senseless" state of fear to which she returns in adulthood at the hands of the doctors. Although, like the Madonna, Zelda's "special" status sets her up on a pedestal, like the child she must be seen *but not heard*. Building upon this denial of the senses, unlike the predatory voyeurism found at the centre of Huston's and Head's narratives, the treatment of eye imagery in *The Birth Machine* attributes it symbolically with a haunting blindness rather than a hunting stare and is thus also associated with guilt and mutilation. The typically introspective nightmare image of "the eye of a sad victim, the mirror of a tortured soul"⁴⁵ is most powerfully used in connection with Zelda's nightmares of bringing forth a child whose "mouthless face cannot cry" (p.92) and who, as we have "seen":-

Had only one eye. No nose. Its eye folded inwards to the centre, and the single eye looking out, like the eye of a bean. (BM,83)

Along with the nightmare associations of the boy's severed skull, this returns us to the use of circular imagery found within these texts. From Roland's "two brown circles of pleading...of disbelief" (p.88) to the "two dark round stones" (p.92) of the baby, Baines uses the circular form of

the wide-eyed stare as a representation of victimised vulnerability in opposition to the piercing phallic weapons found in Huston's novel. In this way their nightmare quality derives not from a sense of predatory terror, but from a horrifying recognition of guilt and culpability:-

An eye for an eye. She had hurt him, she must pay...A gouged eye for an eye. One yawning space for another. (BM,111)

Thus although not rendered explicit, Baines does offer surface manifestations of the original horror image, but displaces them through events and chronology. Aptly enough, the feelings of guilt which the child Zelda suppresses through a prohibitive silence, ultimately find expression through visual form. In an attempt at displacement, she immerses herself into creating a detailed drawing of a village, packing the page with shopkeepers and merchandise. On one level this poses as a wish-fulfilment of her earlier desire to cover her father's sketching paper with such a picture, filling up the blank space with colour. On another, however, the "Two dots, a dash, a half-circle like a moon" (p.93) which represents the butcher's face seem more than a little reminiscent of the defamiliarised reference to the living boy's "face split open, a straight gap between the freckles" (p.99). However, in refusing to describe in any explicitly gratuitous detail the horrific image of the boy's battered and bloody skull, Baines herself mirrors her character Zelda's refusal to explicitly articulate her experience. In this respect both problematise Stephen King's view that:-

..."the very basis of the horror story" is made up of "secrets best left untold and things best left unsaid ..."46 (my emphasis)

because this aspect of the narrative is composed from secrets that do remain unsaid throughout and are yet communicated by indirect narrative means which place the onus upon the reader's own imaginative ability. Interestingly this fits in well with the use of the fairy tale motif which runs throughout the text. As in the case of the description of the disembodied skull, the power of the fairy-tale is not located within its surface narrative, but on the level of the "unsaid". It is surely this awareness which explains Freud's inability to apply his own theory of "The 'Uncanny'" to this as a fantasy mode. His extraordinary claim that:-

...I cannot think of any genuine fairy story which has anything uncanny about it...Apparent death and the re-animation of the dead have been represented as most uncanny themes. But...who would be so bold as to call it uncanny for instance, when Snow-White opens her eyes once more?...47

is surely greeted with bewilderment by most contemporary readers familiar with feminist rereadings of such tales. On the contrary there is something deeply chilling and nightmarish in the underlying ideological foundations of such narratives, however superficially disguised, as becomes clear in Gilbert and Gubar's rereading of the "Snow White" story:-

Here, wielding as weapons the tools patriarchy suggests that women use to kill themselves into art, [Snow White and her stepmother] literally try to kill each other with art. Shadow fights shadow, image destroys image in the crystal prison [of the mirror], as if the 'fiend'...should plot to destroy the 'angel'...⁴⁸

So we see that fairy tales and horror narratives have a great deal more in common than one might at first believe. Interestingly critics have considered both to deal fundamentally with childhood anxieties of separation⁴⁹. Presumably this is said of the fairy story because it typically deals with solitary childhood figures who undertake physical journeys as a means to acquiring knowledge of the adult world; while the "fear of the dark" motif, as Grixti comments, enforces separation in the horror narrative through rendering the familiar unfamiliar. What is significant, however, is that in the case of the fairy tale narrative separation is therefore merely a temporarily disturbing phenomenon, whereas in the latter it is a source of deep-rooted fears not easily routed. It is perhaps this disparity that explains the clear distinction between the attitudes held towards the figure of the witch in Head's and Baines' respective narratives. The albeit passing allusion to Mrs Jones as a sinister witch figure in *A Question of Power* evokes a genuinely horrifying fantasy image which is not necessarily qualified by our belief that the allusion is total fabrication on Dan's part. To some extent this is perhaps due to the reader's disturbing recognition that Blackwomen's writing has always had to deal with perceptions of the self which "metaphorize [her] as the 'dark continent' (Africa): the figure/witch of mystery"⁵⁰, and thus that Head

is deliberately confronting us with the colonialist prejudicial fears of "Blackwoman as Other" which still underlie white Western culture. But it also seems to derive from the dense atmosphere of supernatural horror which pervades the narrative throughout, for within *The Birth Machine* similar doubts surrounding the validity of such accusations do actually reduce Baines' "witch" figure's depiction to the rather more palatable version found within the children's narrative. As in the previous example, although therefore temporarily horrifying, as the following illustrates:-

The witch had been there in their absence. They could tell by the sign. A dead bird on the leaves, wings hooked like a swastika, the head all but ripped from the body, hanging by a thread... (BM,57)

the reader knows that any woman who is elderly, eccentric, isolated from society as a whole and, above all creative (as this woman's skill with baking shows she is) must be a "witch" in patriarchal terms. Her status depends upon no more than this.

Such disparities between the implicit and the explicit have always been at the centre of popular media debates about the psychological impact of the nightmare narrative. Among the many moral dilemmas raised by the proliferation of conventional horror narratives and the effect of repeated exposure to them experienced by so many adolescents, is the question of the extent to which graphically horrifying images should be made explicit, rather than left to the imagination. An answer to this is provided by Dennis Giles

who, writing about the power of the cinematic gaze, comments that:-

The viewer "knows" that the more he/she stares, the more the terror will dissipate...[and] the image of full horror will be revealed (unveiled) as...a fantasy, more a fiction than the fiction which prepares and exhibits it.⁵¹

In the case of these texts, because horror is not gratuitously pleasurable but functions as an important exploration of the means by which so many women's realities are structured by nightmare outside of the limits of the text, such dissipation is actually to be avoided. In the previous chapter it was argued that the "unspoken" element of the fantastic is at its most powerful when implied but not articulated, and the same is clearly true here.

Freud's work on the related concepts of prohibition and transgression primarily focuses upon his anthropological study of "primitive cultures" and their relationship to a variety of cultural taboos. That the origins of the term "taboo" combine associations of the sacred (and thus the supernatural) with the forbidden⁵² makes this issue particularly applicable to this chapter. Three areas of human life seem particularly susceptible to taboo prohibitions: eating, fornication and death. Linking his findings to the symptoms manifested by patients suffering from neurosis Freud claimed a series of parallels which are also of interest to the psychological aspects of these narratives. It has been noted above that the relationship between the central protagonists of these texts and their nightmare world originates out of a childhood past, and that

the power of the uncanny, in Freudian terms, is perceived to lie within "something repressed which recurs"⁵³. It is significant how frequently parental influence seems to be strangely disturbing in these novels, and almost without fail this sense of disturbance is conveyed through the repetition of nightmare motifs, something that returns us to Freud's observation that:-

Obsessional prohibitions involve just as extensive renunciations and restrictions ...as do taboo prohibitions...⁵⁴

David Punter acknowledges the common oscillation between "attraction and repulsion, worship and condemnation"⁵⁵ which forges our relationship to such issues and Zelda's mother, like Omayya's and Istina's, is certainly such an ambiguous figure. Like the so-called "witch" in the woods, and Annie in the den, Zelda's mother is associated with the gathering and mixing of natural ingredients which will be magically transformed into nutritious and delicious compounds. In particular, the growing and gathering of herbs forms the focus for this, a focus which reminds us, once again, of the double-edged associations of herbs as plants which can both heal and poison. Cooking up a dish of faggots, the disturbing similarities with the witch's spell or the ritual slaughter are very clear in Zelda's mind:-

...Zelda passed the bundle [of sage], furry as an animal, and Mother brought the knife down. The leaves bounced, she trapped them, dragging them back again ...No mercy. Now the liver: the dark mass shivered as she scooped it, little tongues of it licked her wrist. She pushed it into the mincer...and slapped back the little arms that flailed...The air was filled with the high metallic stink of blood. (BM,17)

Female creativity here is seen to be transgressive in combining two of the activities commonly susceptible to prohibitive restrictions: killing and eating. Although the sage is vegetable tissue, the imagery of the passage compares it to a slaughtered animal. In addition, although the meat is already dead, Baines combines the references to parts of the body which can still lick and flail with the vital evocations of the word "live-r" to add to the murderous connotations. Like Omayra, Zelda fears that her observation of her mother's actions will lead to her inheriting these "destructive tendencies" and further, that she will inflict them upon her own children, perhaps actually murdering them as a result. It is significant that, remembering climbing into bed beside her mother as a child, Zelda's perceptions of the latter's body which "stirred closely, giving off a faint odour like ripe fruit" (p.17) are notably similar to those of her own pregnant self in adulthood. But that fertility and death are inseparably linked has already been made clear in the use of circular imagery noted above, and to that extent we fear that Zelda's perfect "O" (as her mother's is implied to be) may also be a deceptive disguise.

But the mother is not the only parent whose influence upon the various characters' psychic development is profound and even destructive, and it is at this point that obsessional prohibitions come most clearly to the fore. Although Huston's character Cybele is also at best an ambivalent figure; associated with and extending the role of biological father to Omayra are two alternative "father figures": her therapist and her lawyer, both of whom via

their clear manipulation of patriarchal discourse, operate as oppressive representatives of "The Law of the Father". In this respect Huston both utilises and challenges Freudian approaches to this issue. Quoting Dr M. Wulff of Odessa Freud comments:-

Phobias of...fowls and other domestic animals...in analysis almost invariably turn out to be a displacement on to the animals of the child's fear of one of his parents...

the totem animal most frequently forming a substitute for the father⁵⁶. Omay'a's actual father (significantly referred to as "The Owl" throughout) seems to play precisely such a totemic role in Omay'a's nightmare experience. Although one might argue that an owl is not a domesticated bird, the owl from which Omay'a's father's name derives is precisely such a symbol. Haunted in childhood by the terrifying stare of a stuffed owl in a glass case at her Grandmother's house, this owl is both domesticated and dead and thus phobic in a dual sense. But equally this context reminds us of childhood literary fears of our own. The archetypal fantasy predator of the forest who hides out in Grandmother's house in a masquerade of domesticated passivity is obviously that of the wolf who will consume Little Red Riding Hood visually, orally and (as contemporary reworkings of the story imply) sexually⁵⁷. The owl is another such ambivalent literary figure. Although endearingly used as the wise friendly scholar of some children's nursery tales he (and it is almost always depicted as a masculine character) is also a nocturnal predator who will pounce upon and destroy the more vulnerable creatures of the fields and woods. In both *The Story of Omay'a* and *A Question of Power* the owl carries these

connotations. On the one hand the owl in the guise of Omayya's father is perceived by her as a guide and protector:-

Everything seemed so easy. I can float! I can drive! Seated at first between his legs, I would hold the steering-wheel. When a lorry suddenly loomed up in front of us and a collision seemed inevitable, I'd cover my face with both hands and the Owl would save me from death. As long as he was there, I had nothing to fear. (SO,36)

On the other, however, there is a far more disturbing dimension to this figure, which resides in his predatory nocturnal "wanderings" in the forest, often with his daughter. The transgressive implications of this are surely made clear by the following:-

What he was doing in the forest was not opening cages, but smashing everything that bore any resemblance to a limit. One evening...we came to a barrier. The letters on the sign were perfectly clear: PRIVATE PROPERTY...Livid, he got out of the car, pushed the barrier aside, and we penetrated into the forbidden territory together. Joy took hold of him and rendered him unrecognisable. No one saw us, no one punished us, the barrier was put back into place as though nothing had ever happened... (SO,42)

and emphasised by the accusations Omayya displaces onto her mother:-

You're the one who hid your eyes, Cybele. Concerning the Owl. You're the one who absolutely insisted on remaining in the dark... (SO,6)

But, according to Freud, "disobedience to prohibitions spreads like a contagion"⁵⁸ and to that extent, just as Zelda stands by watching her mother's transgressive actions

in the kitchen, both Cybele and Omayya are irrevocable accomplices to the father's actions (the former once again through self-willed blindness and the latter through passive compliance), a sense of guilt from which all of Omayya's subsequent nightmares surely derive. In Head's novel owl imagery first emerges in connection with Sello, the ghostly figure of the monk who visits Elizabeth in her dreams and who refers to himself as "a wise old owl" (p.48). Once again the image recurs, this time as a motif of horror rather than terror as Elizabeth steps out of her door on the way, significantly, to draw water from a well. There on the transgressive territory of the doorstep she finds an owl lying dead. That the nightmare vision of this dead animal functions as a prelude to the afore-mentioned murder of the boy in the bush demonstrates that Elizabeth, like Omayya, is not merely a *victim* of the nightmare world, but a participant within it. When she returns to her house later in the day to find that the owl has disappeared, the reader wonders if the owl was simply an hallucination. But in a nightmare world in which reality and fantasy mingle through the tortured realms of the psyche, empirical evidence offers little in the form of consolation.

Bestial Transformations and the Splitting of the Self

For the writer interested in exploring the relationship between fantasy and reality, animal imagery offers an important vehicle for alternative explorations of the human condition. In conventional horror narratives the transmutation between human and inhuman forms is frequently explored in terms of the relationship within the self

between the civilised and what Grixti refers to as "Naked animal behaviour" or a destructive primeval instinct⁵⁹. But Swinfen acknowledges that one of the earliest totemic practices involved "the desire to enter the skin of the animal and assume his very nature and individuality"⁶⁰, a desire which pulls us, not towards an unproblematic horror of bestiality as innately destructive and fearful, but a far more complex fear which acknowledges "a deep chord of imaginative recognition"⁶¹ with bestiality that humankind expends endless energy in repressing. From Carroll to Kafka and beyond, the pre-eminence of such fearful desires within works of the fantastic has been readily apparent. But perhaps the application of metamorphosis to those works which draw upon the fantastic as an exploration of women's relationship with society is slightly different. In an essay which parallels the position of women within a patriarchal culture with that of animal flesh, Susanne Kappeler⁶² claims that the relationship between men and women is one akin to that of men and animals, the woman occupying the position of either dangerously exotic Other (the wild beast) or domestic pet (clearly Roland's perceptions of Zelda). In *The Birth Machine* there are two chief manifestations of such imagery: birds and fish. The fish derives primary significance from the original fairy tale of "Briar Rose", and is associated throughout with initiation into the watery realms which represent the nightmare world. The use of bird imagery, however, is more complex and reminds us of its usage in Greenwood's text in the previous chapter. Once again deriving from Zelda's childhood fears, the bird presides over her nightmares as a sinister presence. Initially

taking on significance through its desecration at the den, Zelda attributes the boy's death to his disturbance of the bird's body, which appears to seek immediate retribution:-

...angry life welled up out of its feathers:
green and blue flies welling up and shooting
off at tangents into the air. (BM,58)

Returning home in order to take refuge from this portent, she is further horrified to find what she believes to be the bird alive again and perched on her roof. In cutting off her retreat and appearing to eye her threateningly, it thus embodies a further central device associated with the uncanny: the apparent instability of the dead body which returns from death in order to menace those still alive. Zelda's reaction to this uncanny image: "She dared not move. She was trapped. She couldn't get past..." (p.59) demonstrates the manner in which paralysis still forms the main manifestation of her terror. As this memory recurs, we recognise Zelda's belief in the bird as another metamorphosed version of the "witch", flying off "with a cackle" as her mother, this time in the guise of the domestic angel, appears on the doorstep.

Animal imagery is also important in *Faces in the Water* where the various inmates, dehumanised to the extent that they are controlled on mass like herded cattle, are repeatedly compared with animals, both in terms of their language use and their gestures, something that makes their sewing of:-

...soft felt toys - ducks, rabbits, bears,
all...given human expressions and dressed in
hats and coats and aprons... (FW,227)

particularly poignant. So Kathleen is compared with a stamping horse (p.207), the scurrying inmates of Ward Four-Five-and-One with "insects or flightless birds" (p.84), and Mrs. Hogg who may be either staff or inmate (indeed it is not clear whether she is purely and simply a figment of Istina's imagination), is a figure who would clearly be quite at home in an allegorical or nursery tale:-

...has had her goiter out, and you should see the stream of cream that flows from the hole in her throat and hear the satisfactory whistling of her breath. (FW,13)

But animal imagery is also used by Istina in connection with those who are permitted to venture outside of the walls of the institution. Both the staff and Istina's own family become more and more alien in comparison with herself, and are thus as representative of "Otherness" for her as the inmates are. Her headmaster is referred to as having a name "that sounded like a buzzard" (p.12), one of the staff is called Sister Wolf, and Istina's own mother and father become so remote from her that:-

...sometimes they played tricks on me and vanished and changed to birds beating powerful wings and setting up a storm in the air. (FW,55)

Bird imagery in Frame's text seems more synonymous with the desire to take flight and escape than with the predatory implications of Huston's text. But within the walls of the institution wings are, in reality, incapable of transporting the inmates beyond physical limits. Istina, feeling that her life within the institution has driven her outside of the

limits of humanity seeks, in fantasy, refuge from her nightmare world elsewhere:-

...in a hole in the earth or a web in the corner of a high ceiling or a safe nest between two rocks on an exposed coast mauled by the sea. (FW,215)

If animal imagery is often a displaced version of the human, it is surely significant that the images conjured up in this passage are those associated either with female nurturance (dens and nests) or female creativity (the spinning of webs). Istina's references to her mother seem couched in the language of coldness and distance, but perhaps translating the nurturing qualities into an animal form enables her to derive the necessary comfort from them in a way denied her in reality. This is reinforced by a bizarre recollection brought about by Istina's escape from Cliffhaven. Ringing the hospital on reaching the railway station seems, in itself, an attention-seeking act on her part deriving from a lack of received affection. Moreover, it is interesting that, in coming to fetch Istina, "Sister" Bridge behaves more like a mother than a sister, simultaneously reprimanding Istina and yet also treating her to an ice-cream. For Istina, the desire for maternal identification is clearly very strong, and leads to an intermingling of human and animal associations in her mind, as well as a confusion over past and present, reality and unreality:-

...I sat all my life in a gasoline shed under the walnut tree in Sister Bridge's house, with the cow Beauty breathing in my face...And when I lived in that little house my mother lived there with me, taking out her

floppy titties to feed the baby and sometimes giving me a taste, or squeezing a jet of Beauty's milk into my mouth. So which was Beauty and which was my mother and which was Sister Bridge? (FW, 174-5)

Lisa Tuttle considers the current trend towards the metamorphic transformation of women into animals among women writers of fantasy, a particularly useful means via which the marginal positioning of women under patriarchy can be expressed. In this respect she claims that such writers aim to:-

...integrat[e] the fact of being female with the fact of being human despite the messages all around declaring that the two are not compatable [sic]...[It becomes] a way of expressing how cut off and alienated women feel from male-defined, male-dominated, male-limited 'human' culture...⁶³

Kappeler, as noted above, also insists upon a political dimension residing within women's relationship with the metamorphic animal form, but claims that it is through the pre-eminence of the masculine gaze that women are projected in reality into a subordinate animal role. In an extension of Swinfen's argument and picking up on Freud's references to defamiliarisation in the context of perceptual disturbances, she argues that:-

The basis of every argument on gender differences...is the superficial anatomy, which renders women 'unlike' men, and...has far outweighed whatever might render them 'like'. 'Unlike' is the basic presupposition, 'like' is then what fascinates man and appears to him uncanny.⁶⁴

In other words, surprising himself in looking into the eyes of a woman, man is disturbed by a paradoxical similarity which simultaneously signifies difference, in the same way

in which men are claimed to do with animals. In combining Tuttle's with Kappeler's approach one could argue that it is therefore not simply women's fears of being cut off that are being expressed in these nightmare motifs, but also their fears of being cut up by the piercing masculine gaze.

Certainly the most disturbing legacy left by animal imagery in Huston's text are the staring eyes of the Owl through which the predatory masculine gaze is filtered. Although we have seen that it is the mother who is explicitly associated with castration and mutilation, implicitly wounds are also inflicted by such piercing means, empirical contradiction once again offering little in the way of reassurance:-

The man sitting across from me is staring at me. His feet are all I can see of him, but he can see the whole of Omayá. He's looking her over, his eyes are travelling up and down her body, up and down...He wants to force me to raise my eyes, he wants to pierce my defenceless pupils and get into my brain, from there go down through my body, making my heart thump, my nipples stiffen, my hands tremble. He wants to make me melt beneath his fiery gaze... turn me into a quivering mass of jelly ...Omayá raises her eyes, accepts the challenge. The man is asleep... (SO,8)

An interesting split emerges here in the persona of Omayá, as the narrative alternates between the third and first person, such problematic distinctions between self and other forming a commonplace preoccupation within all forms of literary fantasy. But whereas Todorov, for example, sets up a distinction within his work between fantasies of the "I" and those of the "not-I"⁶⁵ Huston, by means of a proliferation of word-play, picks up on Jane Gallop's observation that it is indeed through the gaze that we make

"...the discovery that [woman] is not a *whole*, but a *hole* [O]"⁶⁶ and adds a gendered dimension to Todorov's approach to this issue by setting up an opposition between the phallic "I" and the non-phallic "O". It is particularly apparent in the context of Huston's novel that the dismemberment of the body has clear implications for the woman's relationship with language. The proliferation of eyes by which Omayya is repeatedly interrogated and assaulted throughout the text become, under the terms of the Law of the Father, phallic "I's" which, she fears, will split her apart. Faced by the analyst or the magistrate and their solid, eye to eye (I to I/one to one) contact with language in its guise as "the truth", Omayya crumbles, her identity fragmenting and dismembering:-

...the little girl...answers every question put to her...she likes the man ...and she's afraid of disappointing him ...the man tells her to say words... Omayya feels her mind gradually emptying, as though she were swallowing...all the language she'd ever learned, swallowing her tongue. She barely manages to salvage a few nouns...there's nothing left, her mind is a blank...I'm not supposed to say the same word twice...he must think I'm ridiculous...Her voice stops. Silence. Is that all? says the man. She nods her head, annihilated. (SO,14)

In a scene which clearly foregrounds and embodies the verbal play between the words "therapist" and "the rapist" one of the most disturbing aspects of this scene is that the words which annihilate Omayya are perceived as being hers - just as The Law of the Father will claim that it is her own body that causes her downfall at the hands of the rapists. Yet the circumstances under which the scene takes place demonstrate quite clearly that these words are part of an

alien and alienating code which she has managed to (at least partially) assimilate. Thus she vomits up these "verbal gobs" (p.23), choking in the process on her own, ill-fitting tongue and retching desperately when there is nothing left to regurgitate, a childhood memory reiterated by the horrors of the rape scene and by the ending of the text as she is once again crushed by "her" own words:-

"Please try to express yourself more clearly, and to give us nothing but the relevant details...Kindly stick to the version of the facts that has already been set down by the clerk...I will allow the members of the jury to draw their own conclusions from the confession the plaintiff has just made. When things exist, she is capable of acting as though they don't; it follows logically than [sic] when things do not exist, she is capable of acting as though they do. No further questions"...there's nothing more we can do for you. It's no longer possible to save you, it's all over...you'll get only what you deserve: a nought. That is the final verdict. You have only yourself to blame."
(SO,147-8)

That Omayya ends up with "nought" (0) simply reiterates what we know already, that she is left with the stamp of her own identity through a naming that marks her, both as "lack" and, in the terms of her nightmare experience, a wounded space defined by mutilation. In the earlier passage depicting the one-sided power of the gaze, what is clear is that it is Omayya's own fantastic fear of the penetrative gaze that splits her in two, not the reality of the knife/phallus, a point that renders this issue less "clear-cut" than it might at first appear. Although the masculine gaze is explicitly presented here as a phallic weapon, it is implicitly offered as a fantasy device which simultaneously threatens and seduces and it is upon this implied s(p)lit

that these phallic "eyes" focus. That the language describing the manner in which the woman's body is transformed into rigidity through terror is also descriptive of orgasm, should not be overlooked, as the fact that "the Big O" can also function as a signifier for this reminds us once again of the stereotypical associations via which pleasure and pain are linked in the mind of the patriarchal reader/writer⁶⁷.

In considering the relationship between apparently contradictory impulses, it is important to acknowledge that, as Jackson observes, metamorphosis can either function as empowering wish-fulfilment, or as an involuntary nightmare transformation. Interestingly it is with the latter that most theorists are pre-occupied. Irving Massey, for example, begins his excellent book on the subject with the disclaimer that "metamorphosis is a morbid subject"⁶⁸, while Gaston Bachelard links it directly with a "function of fear"⁶⁹ resident within the imagination. In novels such as these four, however, in which the explosion and mutilation of bodily limits accompanies transformations into the Other, it is not simply the nightmare dimensions of the metamorphic that are explored, but the splitting of the self through contradiction and paradox. Thus in Huston's text we are simultaneously confronted, through language, with two conflicting fantasies: Omayya's nightmare fantasy that all men want to rape and mutilate her, and the patriarchal wish-fulfilment fantasy which claims that all women want to be raped and mutilated. But such conflicting and disturbing fantasies are by no means specific to *The Story of Omayya*. Even the tone of Frame's work has been described as being

"always on the edge between terror and joy"⁷⁰, a positionality which reminds us, once again, of these novels' status as transgressive narratives. That transgression involves "the continuing conflict between the prohibition and the instinct"⁷¹ has already been considered, but time and again theorists also refer to the nightmare narrative in dialectical terms, Bruce Kavin going so far as to define the very term "nightmare" as:-

...a dream whose undercurrent of anxiety both presents and masks the desire to fulfill and be punished for certain conventionally unacceptable impulses...⁷²

Indeed the very act of participation on behalf of the audience or reader of such narratives is similarly dependent upon a self-willed split between surreptitious voyeur and "protected" victim (both dependent upon seclusion under cover of darkness). On the whole this is considered to be an "acceptable" breach of the taboo, enabling a fantasised transgression which leaves actual prohibitive barriers intact. But in a particularly disturbing analysis of the typical composition of the cinema audience of the horror film, the fragility of the limitations between fantasy and reality is made all too clear:-

...a number of older men (never women) ...usually [sit] separately, often by themselves...They are not there to be frightened, but to participate...to help dish out the punishment, something they seem to enjoy...You can occasionally hear the young audience, especially the girls, squealing "watch out! be careful!" to the female protagonist, while the older males mutter, "yeah, get her, get even, knife her, punish her!" - everything but what they may really be thinking, which is "rape her! rape her!"⁷³

In this terrifying account of the means by which visual gratification sanctions such destructive desires, the ease with which masculinist fantasies become the realities of the the sex murderer are made entirely evident. Twitchell's claims that such fantasies function as a perverse revenge upon the increasing level of sexual and social autonomy women have attained over the last three decades emphasise the contemporary relevance of studies such as Carter's and Theweleit's. Significantly, although both the latter begin from very different socio-historical perspectives and each choose a select and particularly extreme focus for analysis⁷⁴, they actually unearth strikingly similar preoccupations and, in doing so, refuse to evade the deeply disturbing quality of the *body* of material under scrutiny. In this respect, however, their own narratives are ironically transformed into a complex combination of horror and fascination which is precisely the lure of the fictional narratives under consideration here. When Head's character Elizabeth, for example, honing in upon Dan and his supposed insight into the private lives of those around her, finds herself simultaneously transfixed and repulsed by his terrifying vision, the reader knows exactly what she means when she refers to her experience as being:-

...like the rabbit trapped in helpless fascination by the powerful downward swoop of the hawk. It knows its death is near and awaits it, helplessly... (QP, 160)

because precisely such tensions characterise our own response to this text. Two types of fantasy are juxtaposed with regard to this issue: the pleasurable fantasies of empowerment and revenge constructed by those men whose own

state of "frozen terror"⁷⁵ can only be assuaged through their delight in the destruction and mutilation of women; alongside the terrifying and paralysing fantasies which torment women as a result. The ubiquitous fear of rape and assault held by women and so powerfully explored by Huston in *The Story of Omya* may indeed, as Carter suggests, derive from a profound sense that women are living a wounded and castrated existence in reality. As Twitchell observes, nightmare narratives:-

...establish social patterns not of escape, but entry. Night visitors [literal or metaphorical] prepare us for daylight.⁷⁶ (my emphasis)

Through a rereading of what appears to be a current cinematic obsession with the "aestheticised" nightmare transformation of women into meat⁷⁷, *The Birth Machine* demonstrates how this can also be achieved by seemingly benevolent means. Zelda's father, passing a large joint of meat on the kitchen dresser, pinches and admires it in a manner immediately reminiscent of the aging playboy, whilst the adult Zelda is reminded on more than one occasion of herself as a plate of meat. Cameron and Frazer, discussing the cultural image of the "Murderer as Hero", recognise the dichotomy which exists between the media image of the bestial or monstrous fantasy of the "serial killer", and the reality of the "ordinary" man who is finally discovered to have committed the deed(s):-

In most cases, the beast will eventually be revealed not as a monster, but as the man next door. The journalist must then deal somehow with the glaring fact that sex-killers are rarely... "ugly hunchbacks with boils all over their faces"; they are more likely to fall within the journalistic category "happily married father of two".⁷⁸

Far from reassuring, this observation merely confronts the woman as victim with a nightmare choice between the explicit horror of the mythic monster or the subtle terror of the "merely" human predator. It has been said of metamorphosis that "Even when it expresses a positive choice, it is a choice between difficult alternatives: usually a desperate choice"⁷⁹, and when it expresses a nightmare choice it seems that it becomes a means via which women can choose in addition between mutilation by others or mutilation by the self. Roland, taking Zelda out to a restaurant, fails to realise that what he is encouraging her to digest is an image of the "smothered hump" of her own body, which she fears is also "rotten", "sour and musty" if, as with the pheasant, it is camouflaged as creative and succulently fruitful (pp.89-90). Likewise in *The Story of Omayya* there are several instances of women metamorphosing into meat. As the above-mentioned references to owl imagery illustrate, where such imagery is used to refer to masculine characters, the animals are those associated with hunting or aggression. When applied to the feminine, however, it is used consistently in the sense of tasty (and even at times butchered) flesh. Omayya, for example, buying a chicken to cook for friends, suddenly finds herself confronted in this way by a terrifying manifestation of herself as rape victim:-

...the head with its narrow eye-slits...The drumsticks are its thighs. Spread apart the thighs. Slip the knife in...Saw...And inside, it's unspeakable. Omayya vomits...Omayya chokes. Chicken neck stuffed down her throat. Blue-veined skin sliding on the muscle, wrinkling back and forth. A neck inside her neck. She wants to vomit but she's pinned down. (SO,20-1)

Two main types of image recur here, that of blades and eyes. One notices that the eyes are described as "slits", an image which anticipates the reference to the knife, while the knife is not seen to cut or to slice, but to "saw". Throughout this text eyes cut through Omayya like knives through flesh, but through the conjoining of terminology implied through the use of the past participle of the verb "to see", while these eyes *used* to see they are now the blinded versions of the victim. It is this piece of insight which results, as the passage continues, in Omayya and the chicken changing places in fantasy, both oscillating between victim and oppressor⁸⁰.

Elsewhere in the text Omayya is also seen to metamorphose into a rabbit and a lamb, tender young flesh sliced apart by the phallus. When a similar fate is imposed upon an Oriental woman on the underground train, we recognise that the capital O which defines her identity is once again not insignificant. But it is when faced on the underground by another woman, this time in a state of pregnancy, that Omayya is reminded of further associations between woman and self-willed bestiality:-

...a fat dairy cow...aims her uterus at Omayya like a rifle. So sure of her right to sit there, to take up all the space, to splay her legs apart, she spreads out, superb and hideous, triumphant. Narrow blue viperine snakes are crawling up her calves, teeming like living vermicelli...The dairy cow draws a book from her bag...props it up on her uterus and begins to read...I know what words the fat cow is absorbing this very moment...the cow's lips start to form the same insipid smile as the heroine's... (SO,125-6)

The split encapsulated here in the term "fat dairy cow" between its associations with the farmyard animal and the commonly used pejorative term aimed at a female human being, enables a shift to take place between the first and the second of these terms. The duality needed for the reader to retain both sides of the metamorphosed image impinges upon our understanding of Omayya's hostility here:-

...in world mythology the cow - white, horned, milk-giving - is one of the most common manifestations of the Great Mother.⁸¹

Although from Eastern philosophy to Walt Disney the cow is admired and even revered, she is also, like the Christian Madonna, consistently associated with gentleness, passivity, and conformity, an awareness reinforced here by her choice of reading matter. For Omayya, who has learnt all too violently, the phallacy of such fantasies, the woman who is "So sure of her right...to splay her legs apart" represents one more pillar, shoring up the bastions of phallocratic dominance. But there are also implications that the "dairy cow's" happy complacency is ill-founded. The significance of the dairy cow reference is that the latter's milk, which by rights belongs to her offspring, is usurped by human beings and used for their consumption. So this woman who, on the

face of it poses as the creative and creating female (from which her smugness derives) is really, through comparison, severely under threat. The disturbing possibilities of this are, indeed, more than hinted at if we hone in on the image of "Narrow blue viperine snakes...crawling up her calves" (my emphasis). In this bovine context, not only is this a reference to the relatively harmless, if unpleasant, varicose veins suffered by human mothers; but a rather more disturbing one to fantastic serpents who, forming an insidiously phallic invasion force, threaten to encroach upon even this seemingly protected sphere of female creativity.

Omayya, being an actress, is well-aware of the relationship between fantasy and reality, and the way in which a submergence into the metamorphic can, if only superficially, be empowering. In putting on a role, she can take on (in both senses of the word) the "other" and, in doing so, evade the trauma and negation of life as Omayya (the "O" increasingly coming to represent negation or nothingness). Thus, as she travels to an audition in a strange locality (p.37), she is able to withstand the unrequested familiarity of two strangers, despite Huston's use of tactile language and the enclosure imagery so reminiscent of the rape scenario, basically because, in the (dis)guise of the *made-up* (fictitious) woman, the "real" Omayya becomes invisible and thus safe. On two other occasions during the narrative Omayya puts on this mask of empowerment, firstly by using her friend and theatrical partner Saroyan as a substitute for the rapists. The director sets up a scene for improvisation:-

...you are a young woman, you're waiting for the underground late at night, you're alone on the platform...the train doesn't come, a young man does come, however...what will happen next...Go ahead. (S0,90)

The scene continues:-

The platform is filthy. Omayya creates the filth...she invokes the tunnel, the long and silent hole of blackness...I've spent my whole life waiting for the train...it's inconceivable that such an emptiness could give birth to my salvation...She spins around, without the least hesitation, she throws herself at the stranger and shoves him with all her might onto the tracks, she knows it will work, in Westerns all you have to do is tie someone to the tracks and the train appears as if by magic...Omayya triumphant and so proud to have dared at last, to have defended herself at last... (S0,90-91)

Here, because the filth and enclosure is of Omayya's own making, she is in a position of total autonomy. So absolute is her confidence in bringing fantasy into reality as a means to control, that she is in no doubt that the train will arrive as a direct consequence of her action and crush the representative of phallic oppression. This is a revenge which tastes all the sweeter as, in her fantasy, the figure of the rapist (and symbol of the oppressive phallus) is destroyed by another phallic image, in the form of the train which rushes - not into, but out of - the tunnel to smash and destroy.

The second example of such empowerment through acting as metamorphosis takes the form of Omayya immersing herself within the guise of the vengeful baker of a plague-infested community:-

Omayya works alone...she remains shut up at home. For ten days. Naked. She reads. And as she reads, she eats. She only gets dressed and leaves the Flat in order to buy bread. She devours page after page and loaf after loaf...She feels the gradual swelling of her flesh ...She's turning into a baker...The other people need me...They don't suspect that what I give them to consume is infected...So I entice them on purpose and I poison them...and I laugh and I rejoice...I'm the all-powerful from now on, I'm the one who deals out death...I'll be the last of us alive. (SO,118-9)

This is a particularly significant passage because here we 'watch' the transformation process taking place. Clearly the physical change from her slender feminine build into a large, weighty one is important to her physical as well as her psychological stature (something which will be explored further in the following chapter). But her role as the instigator of metamorphosis is also significant. Once again, Omayya is in complete control of her transformation. Thus the transition from Omayya to non-Omayya is (through the use of a double negative) perceived to be a positive one, however disturbed we may be about the destructive desires of her new persona. Significantly, as a novel which blurs the boundaries between pleasure and pain in places, metamorphosis mirrors the ambivalence of the mask here⁸². For example, we might argue that the transition we witness from Omayya the powerless victim to the powerful if malevolent baker is one important example of metamorphosis as wish-fulfilment. At other times, however, one is left wondering "what is mask and what is face"⁸³. When we "watch" the transformation of Omayya into not-Omayya through the face of the mirror, for example, we do so in a manner entirely constructed in the discourse of nightmare:-

The shadows play over Omayya's face reflected in the glass. They deform her features, deepening the rings beneath her eyes, emphasising her wrinkles, damaging her skin. Omayya watches herself age...Thirty-five years old, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy...Her skin cracks, her cheeks sag, her eyes sink into their sockets, her hair whitens, her wrinkles branch out into a spiderweb that gets denser by the second. Omayya laughs with terror and recognises the grimace of her granny.
(SO,54)

Jackson draws on Leo Bersani's recognition of the significance of the mirror as a means of projecting onto ourselves possible alternative versions of the self and in doing so emphasises the mask-like role of the reflective surface:-

A mirror produces distance. It establishes a different space, where our notions of self undergo radical change ...By presenting images of the self in another space (both familiar and unfamiliar), the mirror provides versions of self transformed into another, become something or someone else. It...[suggests] the instability of the 'real' on this side of the looking-glass...⁸⁴

In other words, the ultimate challenge posed by the mirror is not, as Lewis Carroll would have us believe, unproblematic immersion into a land of fantasy, but a defamiliarising and fantastic challenge to our belief in the real.

In apparent opposition to the donning of the mask, also tied in with the concept of metamorphosis is the shedding or stripping away of skin(s), a preoccupation which is once again seen to be consistently projected onto the woman as flesh, despite the fact that, in *A Question of Power*, the stripping away of layers of garments begins as an act of religious significance connected with Sello the monk. The

latter is stripped of his vesture garments because he is considered unready for his task, and by association they are likewise denied to Elizabeth because of the evil nature of her relationship with Sello. Later, however, clothing and readiness become associated with Dan and his nice-time girls. In this context, the stripping-away of garments loses its spiritual dimension, and becomes, instead, a reference purely and simply to sexual readiness, for which Dan demands that he be in absolute control:-

...he liked the girls to keep their clothes on until he told them to take them off. (QP, 129)

By comparison, in Baines' novel we witness Zelda's rather inept husband Roland ritually undressing her in an attempt to revitalise their failing marriage, an act which plays upon the suggestion, as in Head's novel, that women are aroused by the fantasy of being stripped by a strange man in a strange location. A paradox emerges here which centres around the relationship between women, clothing and the flesh, in which clothing is perceived on the one hand as protection, and yet on the other as a tantalising and enticing veil, which is present only in order that it be removed. In *The Story of Omayya* this finds its chief manifestation in a variety of scenes, including the fantastic nightmare figures of the ritually flayed virgins which recur throughout the narrative and, by implication, the realist description given of the office girls Omayya encounters. Its primary exploration, however, is through the image of the stripper in the nightclub:-

The hall is overheated...all the gazes converge upon [the woman]...The music accelerates, lubricates...Droplets of sweat run down everyone's forehead and converge into rivulets, rivers of sweat pour onto the stage. The woman gives herself up to the waves...her moist mouth half open...The whole thing is nothing but arabesques, applause, spotlights, sweat, and rolling drums...Ovation. Now the woman is stark naked but for...the triangle of white pearls covering the triangle of black hairs covering the nothingness...Everything flows: the money, the alcohol, the sweat and the rest. Streaks of red and black, streaks of creamy white. (SO, 64-5)

As the layers of clothing are removed, not only is the woman made more vulnerable, but she physically diminishes in size and stature. The corporate gaze, reducing her still further to a single spot on the stage, focuses progressively on a different portion of her body, slicing her up into various portions of "tasty" flesh. Although hers is the "moist mouth", simulacrum of the sexually stimulated vagina, the various bodily secretions which pervade the atmosphere are again reminiscent of the drooling jowls of a roomful of hungry diners. The office girls, attempting to deny their existence as flesh by cutting, plucking, removing, colouring and deodorising parts of their bodies, likewise parade themselves like meat on butcher's hooks. The distinction between the two scenarios depends upon the latter's collective belief in the use of metamorphosis as wish-fulfilment (unlike the stripper, they are not "giving themselves away" but presenting themselves as prizes to be won). However, in being coerced into "sealing their leaks" (p.83) through tamping blood and sweat, metamorphosis becomes a prohibitive denial of excess in terms of both sexuality and the life-force. Similarly, in the case of the

stripper scene, the emphasis attributed to the word "Ovation" through using it as both word and sentence (it being highlighted once again by prefiguring it with the capital "O" so central to this text), merely reminds us of the implied absence of ov-ul-ation, and in doing so further highlights the sterile nature of this reductive scene. A double standard clearly exists between male and female secretions and their relationship with the erotic, which renders men's sweat, saliva and semen acceptable symbols of a positive excess linked with the erotic fantasies of the transgressive voyeur. Menstrual blood, however, remains quite definitely taboo.

Staying with the theme of dismemberment and manifestations of the splitting of the self, Freud's work on the uncanny, as well as picking up on the importance of severance, also prioritises the figure of the literary double as one guaranteed to generate a sense of fear and disturbance within the reader. From this perspective *A Question of Power*, like so many novels dealing with an apparently supernatural conflict, can be read on many levels. From a psychological point of view, Elizabeth appears to be an obvious manifestation of the schizophrenic personality, whilst from a spiritual or supernatural perspective she is equally obviously a manifestation of a person suffering from demonic possession. Although, irrespective of which of these readings is offered, she is quite clearly a character through which we can explore this relationship between the splitting of the subject and alternative versions of the self, the nature of the split is affected in both cases. For example, under the terms of a

psychological reading Elizabeth's split personality renders her a Jekyll and Hyde figure who, in hallucinating a further Jekyll and Hyde figure in the form of Sello becomes split into four distinct and not so distinct facets. Under the terms of a spritual or supernatural reading, however, Elizabeth's own character remains unified (although under attack from the Other), whilst only Sello operates as the demonic double who:-

...alternate[s] lives of sainthood with spells of debauchery...[and exemplifies] two worlds - the saints who died in prison and the dolls and prostitutes with Mary Magdalene in the lead...(QP, 175)

That the reader is, as already stated, incapable of firmly deciding which of these two readings to take, further multiplies the possible splits involved into fantastic proportions indeed. Carol Gilligan's belief that:-

...women appear to perceive the fracture of human connections as violent, whereas men see connection itself as threatening...⁸⁵

is surely one of the issues explored in depth through such fragmented images. But as if this were not enough, further dismemberment also takes place from within the woman's body itself by means of Medusa's thunderbolts, which are capable of shattering her victims into "a thousand fragments", in an ironic nightmare manifestation of Irigaray's rhetorical question "Must [the] multiplicity of female desire...be understood as shards, scattered remnants of a violated sexuality?"⁸⁶. As we have seen, although the thunderbolt is a weapon capable of being aimed against the male figures in this narrative, commonly Medusa focuses all her malevolent

energy against Elizabeth. This destructive and dark force is therefore similar in form to the maliciously destructive force employed by Dan against Miss Pelican-Beak and the mannequin version of Elizabeth. Like the black slime that Dan forces from Miss Pelican-Beak's breasts, Medusa's thunderbolts "...seemed to ooze out of her hands" (p.92) and, like her orgasm, threaten to explode in Elizabeth's face. Medusa's power therefore, although manifesting itself in the form of a perverse distortion of active female sexuality, is really a patriarchal force. Bearing little resemblance to the multiple *jouissance* of the Irigarayan celebration of the woman's body, Medusa's eroticism is channelled exclusively into this projectile force, perceiving its power to be penetratively possessive rather than genuinely generative.

This type of metamorphosis in which possession by the "Other" takes place through an invasion of the body, is closely linked by Jackson with the entropic drive. In claiming that both seek to articulate and explore the instability of the "real", she also argues that it is precisely through such devices of the fantastic that the "violat[ion of] the most cherished of all human unities: the unity of 'character'" is achieved, concluding that:-

Fantasies provide very different images of identity from the solid bodies found in 'realistic' fiction...⁸⁷

In a continuation of her prioritisation of the horrific over the utopian in her discussion of metamorphosis, she goes on to discuss the implications of this for the treatment of character and identity. But one issue she does not consider

in this context is perhaps the most forceful means via which women are confronted with the horrifying possibilities of the possession of one's body by the "Other". As Julia Kristeva comments, the paradox of pregnancy can be:-

...experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of the other...This fundamental challenge to identity is then accompanied by a fantasy of totality - narcissistic completeness...⁸⁸

In texts such as *The Birth Machine* however, although such paradoxical implications for identity clearly are present, the notion of "narcissistic completeness" (fantastic or otherwise) seems an over-simplification. According to Grixti, although the concept of doubling necessitates an acknowledgement of some degree of "narcissistic infatuation", this is simultaneously accompanied by attendant emotions of "fear and hate"⁸⁹ which, in Zelda's terms, often become translated into those of self-hate. Through a variety of devices pregnancy is therefore clearly depicted as an alienation from self and psyche, an alienation imposed by the Other inside, but mirrored by the attitude of others outside.

Arleen Manning, the one character of Baines' novel who is both wise woman and healer and yet quite definitely not a witch, "operates" within this narrative as the aspiring patriarch or, as her name suggests, honorary "man in the making". From this perspective she, like Head's character Dan, slices her patients into pieces, not just through surgical means but through her attitude towards them as human beings:-

The Senior Lecturer hands [her] the foetal stethoscope. Arleen approaches the huge belly on the bed. She places the metal ring on the brown stretched skin. A small gasp is emitted from the woman's face down beyond the sheets, and the belly wobbles. Arleen waits while it subsides. She listens, and counts. (BM,56)

The fragmentation of the woman's body into sections here emphasises the lack of interest Arleen has in the woman as a "totality". Instead her communication is "over the woman's head" (literally and figuratively) and aimed at the male surgeon. Extensive use of synecdoche and metonymy in this text repeatedly reduces characters to little more than "A plastic-glove touch on [the] vulva" (p.9), immersion into the fantastic realms of the psyche seeming to depend upon anatomical fragmentation:-

She sits up. Unhinges her head and shoulders from the rest of her body, unclips them easily...As she floats, swims up, she sees...from the sheet that covers this side of the belly she's left behind on the table...To the left, one of them, guarding tall cylinders, touches her wrist...And then they all raise their heads and look in her direction. They have seen her, they have guessed. They have noticed what she's done. (BM,74)

A similar preoccupation is to be found in *Faces in the Water*, where Istina Mavet remembers that her headmaster, on following her home from school:-

...divided his face and body into three in order to threaten me with triple peril, so that three headmasters followed me, one on each side and one at my heels. (FW,11)

In this context there is an interesting pun contained within the word "head-master" which links this menacing childhood figure with the doctors in the mental institution, who also

presumably perceive themselves as "head-masters", and who are equally menacing to Istina. In Frame's text the primary means of decapitation is via the use of EST in which, as Istina notes:-

...the thieves, wearing gloves and with permission and delicacy...[enter] and politely [ransack] the storehouse...(FW,216)

Istina watches as other patients, too, have their heads shaved as if for a ritual sacrifice. But as if this assault upon the brain were only one manifestation of general dismemberment, there are repeated references to patients whose bodies have been mutilated in the interests of medical science. There is Alice, whose breasts were both removed as a young woman; Mrs. Ogden, the removal of whose ribs provides her with an incessant topic of conversation; and Mrs. Ritchie, who claims enigmatically that a "secret part" of her was erroneously removed by medical staff during an operation. In addition to this, Istina's repetition of the term "remember" in the context of a reference to Brenda Barnes (p.147) seems to imply a "re-membering" of identity and bodily wholeness as much as a recollection of thoughts and memories (although the twin connotations of the word remind us of the link between mental and physical coherence explored in all four texts). In fact Istina feels:-

...ashamed of [her] wholeness compared with Brenda's fragmented mind scattered by secret explosion to the four corners of itself.
(FW,192)

All of these novels draw upon the claims that the notion of psychic dismemberment and the fragmented self incorporates a variety of allusions to the notions of decapitation. The

scene from Baines' novel noted above, in which Zelda's head and shoulders split off from the rest of her body is only one version of the "severed head" imagery which is at the core of these protagonists' nightmares. Returning to the scene, noted earlier, in which Omayya fantasises her revenge upon the rapists by acting out a scenario in which she forces her oppressor off the platform and onto the tracks of the underground, the reaction of those around her demonstrates the means by which the oppression of women is perpetuated through the phallogentric belief in woman's inability to control herself mentally, physically and sexually⁹⁰:-

...she's made a mistake, she's over-reacted...and that is serious. It's very serious if even at the Theatre she starts to lose her head. (SO,91)

Omayya's analyst demands of her:-

'What is the meaning of the expression to lose one's head?...' '...that means that when you're riding a bicycle and you come to the top of a hill...the wheels start turning faster and faster, your head goes flying off into the air and you can't control the machine, you can't restrain yourself, you can't be held responsible, it isn't your fault...there's nothing you can do about it, once you've started you have to go all the way. (SO,91-2)

In *A Question of Power*, accompanying the variety of phallogentric fantasies of women "going all the way" there are also multiple references to heads being cut open or smashed to pieces in a manner often directly linked with horrifying vaginal images of the type Theweleit mentions:-

She found herself faced with a deep cesspit.
it was filled almost to the brim...It was so
high, so powerful, that her neck nearly
snapped off her head at the encounter.
(QP, 53)

That the horror and disgust evoked by nightmare images of the female genital function symbolically as a manifestation of powerlessness calls to mind Hélène Cixous' outline of the important links made between female castration and the image of decapitation. Taking the latter as the ultimate imposition of a prohibitive silence she argues that:-

Women have no choice other than to be
decapitated...if they don't actually lose
their heads by the sword, they only keep them
on condition that they lose them - lose them,
that is, to complete silence, turned into
automatons.⁹¹

Thus the silent, headless woman in *A Question of Power* stands behind "The Father", waiting to invade Elizabeth's body at his behest (p.107) and, in a less explicit but just as powerful example during one of the court scenes of *The Story of Omayya*, the group of women known as "Friends" start singing to signal their presence and support for the main character, only to be silenced by the gavel which slices through the air like a knife, extinguishing their voices as effectively as if their heads had been removed by a guillotine (p.99).

Powerful Pricks and Dumb Dolls

Cixous' use of the word "automaton" in the above-mentioned quotation is worthy of further comment. In its most everyday usage in connection with robotics, fantasy writers have demonstrated the manner in which this has

metaphorical implications for masculine fantasies of the ideal woman, who is "feminine" in appearance, perfect in form, and totally controllable⁹². In *Faces in the Water*, the effect of EST upon Louise is to turn her into a baby-doll who:-

...wet her pants and giggled delightedly, and yet began to take a pride in her appearance
(FW,110 - my emphasis)

The word "yet" here is strangely out of place. In conforming to the falsely constructed image of femininity Louise is bound to take on board the pre-eminence of the masculine gaze as a measuring-stick to appease. This "pride" is no more positive than the incontinence or the purposeless giggling - all are the reactions of the programmed automaton or the "headless chick". In removing the autonomy from her thought processes, the authorities have also denied her individuality. This is made even clearer in the case of Alice whose body, in death, is "transformed, though mildly, as a Jezebel" (p.146). One step on from the inertia of the EST victim, and in transgression of the prohibitions against defiling the dead, the perfection of the woman's corpse here provides an inert canvas upon which passive images of femininity can be constructed.

In *A Question of Power*, alongside Dan's "nice-time" dolls, there is Sello's stuffed effigy of Medusa, which he ignites in an attempt to consume her power. As in Frame's text, the concept of the living woman is reduced to a dummy over which total control can be exercised. This interpretation of the automaton image as that of the mannequin or doll is one which pervades so much of the

writing concerned with the exploration of the cultural stereotyping of women in connection with the relationship between fantasy and reality "...from myth to fairytale to high art to pornography..."⁹³. The uncanny characteristics of this, attendant upon an instability which exists between animation and inanimation, are extended by a feminist rereading of this motif. The puppet is an inanimate object masquerading as an autonomous woman. What renders the puppet both fascinating and disturbing, therefore, is the suspicion that she may, indeed, come to life of her own volition and thus step out of the bounds of patriarchal control. Interestingly, Frame reverses this version of the uncanny by showing how the living woman can be anaesthetised into an automaton by means of:-

...promises to take away the pain by putting
'a little dolly on a dolly's pillow to sleep
in your mouth'. (FW, 198)

But whereas in patriarchal terms this may well eradicate the nightmare element, Frame demonstrates the means by which the fearful implications of this for women are actually increased. The doll is an important image because it is a pivotal focus for so many young girls and their fantasies. But there is a very disturbing dimension to the image of the doll which is brought out in several of these texts. Like Alice, the woman artist who kills herself into art and the robotic housewife, the doll is a personification of perfection (be it in the form of a baby, a small child, or a teenager) precisely because she is dead.

In Baines' novel the monstrous implications of the mannequin figure reside in the figure of the doll as the

symbolic link between the dead boy and Zelda's baby, the primary focus for this association remaining with the decapitation image:-

Absently, [Hilary] stroked the doll's head...curling the wisps that had escaped from the plaits. Annie suddenly shrieked. 'Look what you've done!' Hilary looked down. The doll's hair had come loose. It flapped, above the forehead. She peeled it back...The doll's bald head glimmered. It was pitted all over with rows of holes... Furiously Annie grabbed the doll back... her eyes gleaming wickedly...She slopped her hankie in the saucepan and dabbed the doll's head...The green-brown liquid dribbled through the holes in the skewered head. (BM,37)

This incident, which begins by taking the conventional "creative" lines attributed to children's play is very quickly transformed into a destructive act. The green-brown "stew" which doubles here as a fantasy embrocation to heal the doll's head will, in reality, bring about the destruction of the doll and transform it into a horrifying effigy of the dead boy's body. Thus, long before the latter is discovered, the smell of the rotting doll's head acts as a very clear portent of the nightmare vision that is to come:-

Something stank in the den...The smell was in the pram. They lifted the doll and brown liquid dripped from the joint in her neck. Her body came upright and a pivot in her head moved her eyes open. Annie jabbed them shut with two fingers. This wasn't the moment for her to waken. The spell had gone wrong... (BM,50)

Unlike Sleeping Beauty, the doll's destiny is that of the eternal sleeper, never to awaken from her existence as passive victim. But as Zelda contemplates "...who'd have guessed the inversion? Who'd have guessed it would be the

boy who died?" (p.82). If the doll is the effigy then Annie, acting out the ambivalent role of the witch, transforms the ritual forms of cookery and healing into a ritual death. Furthermore, if Zelda's guilt resides in part from her refusal to be the victim, in accordance with Cixous' argument she retains her head as a child, only to lose it as a woman. After the birth of her own child, Zelda herself becomes the wax effigy:-

A human shape embossed. A torso and legs
...Zelda's arm is outstretched, her hand
still pinned. (BM,99 - my emphasis)

On the level of power, the transition from reality to Zelda's nightmare world is often set in motion by the plunging of the hyperdermic needle into her veins, which then sends her similarly plunging into the watery depths of her horrific memories. Throughout these texts, needles are combined with threads to create an important recurring nightmare motif. The hyperdermic syringe is the most frequent manifestation of this, important in all four texts and consistently functioning as the ultimate in patriarchal control. Again such imagery is reminiscent of Freud's work and his difficulty in "pinning down" the nature of the relationship between women's minds and bodies. Documenting one of his own dreams concerning a patient, he notes:-

I said to [Irma]: 'If you still get pains, it's really only your fault'. She replied: 'If you only knew what pains I've got now...it's choking me ...[I] looked down her throat...on the right [of her mouth] I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs...I at once called in Dr M....M. said: 'There's no doubt it's an infection...' We were directly aware, too, of [its] origin...my friend Otto had given her an injection of... trimethylamin...Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly... And probably the syringe had not been clean.⁹⁴

Karl Abraham's analysis of this dream as a displaced fantasy exploration involving syphilitic infection by means of a dirty phallic "syringe", is backed up by J.N. Isbister, who comments:-

...this is a reasonable supposition on Abraham's part - not least because Freud himself beguilingly uses an unusual word for syringe. The word he actually uses in the dream report is *Spritze* which means a 'squirter': Irma's problems are caused by a 'dirty squirter'.⁹⁵

This image of the needle as the infecting phallus is also present in Huston's novel, from the hornet's sting which "is thrust beneath the skin...ejects its poison and withdraws" (p.62) to the afore-mentioned "dairy cow" who has:-

...on her face countless brown stains and blotches, patches of plague sticking to her cheeks and getting bigger by the second, before long her whole face will be covered with purulent scabs...it starts in the loins, the infection takes root there, and then it spreads throughout the body...a man takes you, he injects his poison into your loins, and then you feel the buboes as the glands begin to swell... (SO,125)

In *A Question of Power*, the needle begins as a reference to a stylus which "exists" within Elizabeth's psyche, playing out a repeated incantation in her head: "Dog, filth, the

Africans will eat you to death..." (p.45). In this respect the hypodermic is placed against itself, and at this stage it appears to take on a reverse function to that of the other texts, having healing properties which seem to banish her nightmare world and replace it with a harmonious reality. Beneath the surface of narrative and skin, however, it once again becomes the "dirty squirter" which has ruptured and is destroying her mind:-

It had taken such a drastic clamour to silence the hissing record in her head, but it had left a terrible wound. She could feel it bleeding and bleeding, quietly. Her so-called analytical mind was being shattered to pieces. (QP, 52-3)

But pricks and needles, of course, also return us to fairy tales and sleeping princesses, and as the staff seek to sedate Zelda with needles, these too take on their fairy-tale associations, linking in with the Sleeping Beauty story:-

You can't bury the bird...you can't bury all the spindles, there'll still be one hidden, closest to home, obsolete, forgotten...all that will be needed is one little prick....
(BM, 72)

Quite clearly Zelda's trauma does indeed begin with the "one little prick" closest to home: her own husband. In all four of these texts, needles join with thread imagery as a means of drawing together the nightmare concerns of the narrative. In *The Birth Machine* they also become a means of forging the links between the fairy-tale and the nightmare implanted within Zelda's mind and body; spinning and weaving imagery displacing the crying of new-born babies into a tormented tapestry in her mind:-

...an elongated thread of sound that picks up another and draws it behind it; more threads spinning under them, then the whole together, a tangle of sound. (BM,86)

Similarly in *A Question of Power*, it is through a combination of the intervention of Miss Sewing-Machine and the phallic needle which "rattles up and down" all night long, that the threads of Elizabeth's nightmare world bind her, forming an invisible umbilical cord tightening around her like a noose. In *The Story of Omayya*, the preoccupation with thread imagery begins, relatively innocuously, with references to physical appearance such as the "threads of saliva" (p.67) on the chins of the inmates of the Castle, or Omayya's sense of dissatisfaction with the hanging threads of her own appearance (p.81). But then, as so often with such allusions in this novel, it recurs as an image of greater significance, coming to be associated with both the thread of the narrative and the "logical" thread of Omayya's thought processes. In this respect it also calls to mind another "passage" and another "hanging thread" found in the work of Freud.

Isbister's account of the incident involving Emma Eckstein is strikingly similar to the concerns of Huston's text and the manner in which all of these novelists utilise needle and thread imagery as an expression of the torment facing their respective protagonists. He informs us that when Freud's patient failed to recover from an operation by Wilhelm Fliess to cure a nasal infection, the former assumed this to be due to hysterical rather than physiological causes. Nevertheless, accompanying another physician in returning to inspect the patient, he noted:-

R...cleaned the area surrounding the [wound]...and suddenly pulled at something like a thread. He kept right on pulling, and before either of us had time to think, at least half a metre of gauze [mistakenly left behind by Fliess after the operation] had been removed from the cavity. The next moment came a flood of blood...⁹⁶

When one considers that Fliess assumed disorders of the nasal passages to be especially linked to sexual disorders, two issues come to light as being of relevance to this chapter. Firstly, of course, there is the centrality of the bloody wound which "infects" the lives of the women concerned and which the Law of the Father attributes to the woman's inability to control both mind and body. Secondly, there is the importance of the passage or tunnel symbolism which, as we have seen, associates the gaping hole with the vagina as an outlet for the menstrual flow, whose "origin" is the *hyster/ical* womb⁹⁷. But another manifestation of the manner in which needles and threads come to be associated with the stitching up of gaping holes is by means of the role played by the sewing *circle* mentioned in Huston's narrative. Once again called upon by a representative of The Law of the Father to pin down a precise definition of the phrase "to lose the thread" (p.85) of something, Omayya's response, as in the case of the afore-mentioned decapitation reference, draws together all the various significances of needles and threads already encountered, from the thread of rational thought to Freud's "dirty squirter":-

It means that when you're sewing, you must never let the thread of your thoughts escape you, you must try to concentrate, doing something with your hands is excellent for concentration, here, for example, the women all sit together knitting in the same room, they talk as they knit and their chatter draws me out of my concentric circle, I have

lost the thread, the needles pierce my palms...the needle thrusts beneath the skin and ejects its liquid, this will calm you down, this will keep you quiet... (SO,86)

In *The Birth Machine* we find both Zelda (figuratively) and the gaping hole of her wounded vaginal opening (literally) being well and truly stitched up by the surgeon who has devised his very own version of the "circular motions" (p.81) of the women's sewing group. Having usurped the "magic" of the power to create he also takes the credit for transforming Zelda's body from its fertile circular form back to "normality" (in the process once again implying that the creating and creative woman is an abnormal phenomenon):-

Abracadabra. Good as new...magic stitches that disappear all by themselves in a week. Invisible mending. (BM,79)

That Omayya is also informed that "...the only proper sewing job is an invisible one" (p.87), returns us to the sad paradox that perfection in the body as well as the body of the woman's text, is not simply achieved through death but also through absence, silence and passivity. Susan Gubar's essay on Isak Dinesen's story "The Blank Page", offers a challenge to the notion that creative invisibility need toe the line of patriarchal conformity. Focusing upon the singular blank sheet which forms the powerful absence at the centre of Dinesen's text, Gubar considers that it:-

...seems an alternative to...the patriarchal identification of women with blankness and passivity...[it is] radically subversive, the result of one woman's defiance...a mysterious but potent act of resistance.⁹⁸

But despite Gubar's celebratory reading of absence, there clearly are problems with valorising women's silence in the guise of unconventional creativity, not least because of the problematics of reception. Dinesen's convent, like Huston's Castle, although functioning on one level as a womb-like safe setting for creative display is also a enclosing ghetto devoid of an audience. In contrast to this Zelda aims to break out by speaking out, transforming her previous fears into positive attributes in finally embracing a recognition that she is, indeed, an "unnatural" mother.

Nightmare Transgressions from within the Body of the Text

Barthes' claim that "The writer is someone who plays with *his* mother's body"⁹⁹ (my emphasis) suggests both, as Suleiman claims, that "Mothers don't write, they are written"¹⁰⁰ and, moreover, that they are implied to be male. However, at the end of *The Birth Machine* Zelda recognises that her only means of purging herself of her nightmare world is by forging her own reality through writing her body. As a means towards breaking free from the taboo of silence which has rendered her a passive and fearful victim, Zelda must first break free from the physical enclosures which have reinforced the structures of nightmare, desiring:-

...to be free of the trap of the cold glass case. And to suffer no guilt. It was that, after all, that was the power of the witch...She can break the seal... She names herself: Teacher, Scientist. The words taste. At last they have texture. At last...to be her own author ...the upper floor drops away and back, a receding space-ship...And then outside... (BM,118-20)

This novel, which has drawn so explicitly upon the duplicitous concerns of the fairy tale form concludes here, in the references to the witch and the "glass case" of the Snow White story, with a recognition that in order to break free from the enclosures which oppress the mind and the body women must equally break free from the confines of such limiting patriarchal modes. In embracing her "madwoman double" however, Zelda is aware of the opposition which will be put up against her actions and words:-

Any woman, then, who speaks out, who thus has control over her own situation and over her children's lives, who makes choices, and carries them out with authority, who recognises and fulfils her own desires...runs a great risk of being labelled...mad by [the men around her] as they attempt to...prevent her speech from being heard. Return to the fairy-tale: do not believe the witch, she will tell you lies or cast a spell on you. Her language is taboo.¹⁰¹

But mothers who warn their children not to tell "fairy stories" (or lies) recognise that it is these tales themselves, with their emphasis upon the imprisonment of women within towers or silence which frame the lie of the "normal" woman as mute and muted object. Throughout *The Birth Machine*, many of the manifestations of Zelda's nightmare existence have typified the dilemmas of the truly creative woman:-

Guilt, desperation, splitting of the self...these are some of the realities ...that writing mothers live with.¹⁰²

At the end, however, Zelda's determination to be her own author demonstrates the empowerment that can be attained when our creativity is allowed to forge our own fantasies, rather than taking on board those we are encouraged to assimilate.

In breaching this conspiracy of silence through creativity all four novelists face up to the need to cut the bonds of the vicious circle which frames the nightmare existence of their protagonists. This chapter opened by claiming that Huston's and Frame's texts have more in common with terror fiction and Baines' and Head's with horror fiction, and yet in common with all the texts discussed in this thesis, there is an important challenge to these generic associations raised by their respective narrative structures. Twitchell argues that "Horror has no end, no closure, no conclusion; terror always has an end"¹⁰³. But the reverse would seem to be the case with regard to these two pairs of novels. Baines' affirmatory ending is mirrored by that of Head's narrative, which actually takes the reader full circle, the whole text existing as a story within a story. But unlike the sewing circle whose creativity may be considered a never-ending repetition going nowhere, Elizabeth's role as embedded narrator recounting her tale inserts an implied before and after in the form of short opening and concluding passages which stand outside of the circular pattern. In a sense therefore, like Sello, Elizabeth simultaneously exists within past, present and

future as we journey with her through the text. In many ways Elizabeth is the typical nightmare protagonist whose:-

...transformation is typically a dangerous process marked by images of violence, horror, transgression, sacrifice, and the descent into darkness and death...

and yet whose ordeal simply acts as a precursor to "rebirth and reunification"¹⁰⁴. Thus, by the time we reach the end of the novel, we recognise that a definite resolution has taken place within Elizabeth's world. The final two sentences:-

As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging... (QP,206)

seem to imply an ambiguity in the use of the word "land". Although on one level referring to Africa and her recognition at last that she has a place and an identity within that society, there does also seem to be an inference suggestive of a reference to her own vagina and a final recognition that that, too, is finally hers again. As Head draws together the various "threads" to create a sense of harmony at last and writes that: "[Elizabeth's] painful, broken nerve-ends quietly knit together" (p.206), the text concludes with an final affirmation of positive female creativity after the various travesties of it that have been endured elsewhere. After the torment that has prefigured this peaceable ending, this is surely the most gratifying conclusion of the four.

But gratification is not something permitted to the reader in either *Faces in the Water* or *The Story of Omayya*. Although Patrick Evans seems to mourn the fact that:-

...reading [Frame's work] is like tangling in a thicket of words and illusions, constantly being moved away from the possibility of explanation or meaning...¹⁰⁵

this is actually one of the most pleasurable characteristics of her text. Far more disturbing is the deliberate resistance to narrative closure offered. That this is partly attributable to the extra-textual fact that both hers and Huston's narratives purport to fictionalise events which "really" happened¹⁰⁶ is perhaps true. But it is not "the full story". Istina's/Frame's enigmatic final words tell us that:-

I looked away from [the patients I knew] and tried not to think of them and repeated to myself what one of the nurses had told me, "when you leave hospital you must forget all you have ever seen...and go and live a normal life in the outside world." And by what I have written in this document you will see, won't you, that I have obeyed her? (FW,253-4)

Although writing in defiance of the authority that has sought to reduce Istina to the status of passive victim, this is simultaneously an acknowledgement of the fact that once one has inhabited the nightmare realm there is no such thing as escape, because concepts such as "normality" and "the outside world" no longer exist outside of the realms of the tortured psyche. In the context of *The Story of Omayya*, however, the impossibility of escape takes on more frightening proportions still.

One important aspect of the reading experience of the conventional horror or terror narrative is the degree, not only of involvement in, but also conspiracy with the material on the part of the reader¹⁰⁷. The option is always

there for the cinema audience to rebel and cover its eyes or for the reader to skip a few lines of the page, should the material become too threatening and begin to overstep the safe limits of narrative containment. From this perspective, however, the reading process of *The Story of Omya* is even more transgressive than its terrorising content. As the prefatory quotation to this chapter implies, psychoanalytic theorists have made much of the belief in the intrinsic link between pleasure and pain as they are experienced in what is referred to by certain phallogentric critics as the "forepleasure" stage of sexual excitement. Bersani¹⁰⁸ argues that within the terms of this argument, the desire for sexual satisfaction is intrinsically a masochistic one, a desire for an explosion or a shattering of the conscious limits of the body which will simultaneously relieve and yet also restimulate what he refers to as "the pleasurable unpleasure" of sexual tension. This complex claim is also worth comparing with Freud's reading of cultural prohibitions, which he considers we unconsciously desire to transgress, failing to do so only because "the fear is stronger than the desire"¹⁰⁹. In the case of the conventional terror or horror narrative the reader must not only desire the transgression, but also the fear, otherwise the text would remain unread. Similarly one of the most disturbing aspects of Huston's novel is that the blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality common to all the texts discussed in this thesis is matched, not only by a blurring of boundaries between memory and hallucination, but also a similar blurring between those of terror and desire.

Considering the political issues at stake in this text, this is a disturbing recognition indeed.

Because *The Story of O* is written using a stream of consciousness narrative technique which operates through the dream-like free association of ideas and the obsessive repetition of motifs, we have no access to the text outside of the parameters of O's psyche. In addition, because of her terrifying rape experience O is incapable of thinking outside the limits of her own body. As such, O's body forms and frames the body of the text, outside which nothing (O) exists (her anatomy quite literally being her destiny). Freud's argument that dreams, however superficially disturbing, are always a means to wish-fulfilment is one which both the magistrate and O's analyst clearly endorse, in their role as representatives of The Law of the Father. The former's claim is delivered with noteworthy authority as "the truth":-

...since it is a well-known fact that women, when they feel pain, often simulate pleasure, the opposite must be equally true: that when they feel pleasure, they can simulate pain. In the present case, I would say, this hypothesis is extremely likely. (SO,124)

As far as O is concerned, the reader recognises that her experience clearly is one of genuine terror. The real nightmare, however, resides with the reader, when it becomes clear that, however unwilling we may be to accept the fact, there is a sense in which the relationship between pain and pleasure is rather closer for us. Reference has already been made to the links which exist between Huston's text and Réage's *The Story of O*. By drawing on a pornographic

tradition Huston leaves us uncomfortably implicated. After all:-

In pornographic literature, the text has a gap left in it on purpose so that the reader may, in imagination, step inside it.¹¹⁰

This is also Huston's strategy. Because of the "O" at the centre of the narrative, and because of the playful nature of the wording of the text, *The Story of O* demands an active reading in which we are required to fill that gaping "O". As Susan Gubar notes:-

...contemporary critics not infrequently write about the act of reading in sexual terms. A 'passage' of a text is a way of knowing a 'corpus' or 'body' of material that should lead us on, tease us - but not too obviously. 'Knowing' a book is not unlike sexual knowing...Not only do we experience gratification orally as we 'devour' books voraciously, we also respond subliminally to the 'rhythms' of the plot, looking forward to a 'climax'.¹¹¹

So the thread of Huston's text, when tugged, serves to unravel or peel away layers of associations (rather like the stripper enticingly peeling away layers of clothing for the eager audience) drawing us inexorably through the text. With its multiple puns, its association of words and images and its spatial techniques; this is very much a text that "plays" with its reader, tantalising as it simultaneously disturbs. Furthermore, the narrative chronology of this text works in accordance with the pattern Bersani applies to the masochistic text when he refers to the pleasures of repetition which move obsessively towards and then away from a climax¹¹². At the same time this is in tension with a single-minded patrilinear desire for relief from such

"pleasurable unpleasure" in the mind of the reader. For example, there are questions to which we desire answers, such as "from where does Omayya's trauma emerge, before or after the rape?" And "what, in fact, happens to her?" Once the legal case is dismissed, and the rapists acquitted, in one sense the text is closed. But on another level the issue is far more complex than this. Because Omayya is "Everywoman", her story must remain ever open (like her body). But Bersani's reading of *The Story of O* has even more disturbing implications for the reader of *The Story of Omayya*:-

Telling the story from O's point of view
...seem[s] to protect O's lovers from any
penetration at all.¹¹³

Because the body of this text is the text of Omayya's body, in progressing through the narrative only at the expense of penetrating the "O" of the text, we are placed in an identical situation to that of the rapists. Carter claims that:-

...somewhere in the fear of rape, is a more
than merely physical terror...a fear of
psychic disintegration, of an essential
dismemberment, a fear of a loss of the self
which is not confined to the victim alone.¹¹⁴
(my emphasis)

The real nightmare for the reader is that, in pursuing this text to its bitter conclusion we have witnessed a loss of the self which (like Omayya's response to the chicken) leaves us with a recognition of ourselves as simultaneously victim and oppressor. Like Istina/Frame, we cannot be discharged with the turning of the final page. Just as the nightmare world spills over into the waking world of these fictional

characters, so we as readers are left uncomfortably implicated.

Conclusion

Perhaps more clearly than any of the others, this chapter of the thesis demonstrates the manner in which narrative disruption on the part of the fantastic takes us into transgressive territory. Operating as an explicit challenge to the type of utopian claims that perceive:-

...the world of desiring fantasies as a world of reinvented, richly fragmented and diversified body-memories...¹¹⁵

each of these four powerful fictional narratives explores the manner in which women's relationship with horror and terror forces them into an anatomical state of dismemberment and mutilation mirrored by a psychological state which is no less "riven, fragmented, tortured, no matter how strong its surface defences"¹¹⁶. A hopeful response to the content of these narratives may be derived from positive feminist rereadings of oppression. Gubar, for example, claims that:-

...we must come to terms with the fact of blood before we can understand the nature of female art...¹¹⁷

while Mary Daly encourages women to embrace the O as a symbol of:-

...the power of our moving, encircling presence, which can make nonbeing sink back into itself. Our "O" is totally other than "nothing"...¹¹⁸

But uplifting though such positivity may be, such claims ironically deny the power of the texts discussed above in qualifying their transgressive potential beyond the limits of the narrative. At first sight the attribution of these texts with transgressive status is perhaps no more than one might expect from a critical appraisal of any generic horror or terror text. After all, in articulating the taboo, all such narratives deal in inherently transgressive material. But, as noted above, there are a series of important differences between generic horror or terror and these four texts, and their relationship with transgression is merely another such site of differentiation.

Just as the romance offers consolation through textual means, so the cathartic pleasures with which the typical horror or terror narrative is associated run the risk of satiating any positive transgressive impulses existing beyond the limits of the text; a belief reinforced by Morris Dickstein's observation that "Going to horror films is a way of neutralizing an anxiety by putting an aesthetic bracket around it"¹¹⁹. As noted above, because of the polemical basis underlying these narratives it is particularly important that such consolation is denied. Transgression is inevitably a dangerous phenomenon and one from which, perhaps understandably, many feminists are all too keen to shy away¹²⁰. Margaret Whitford, for example, is making a very important political point when she argues that "rape is not a question of fantasy, but one of domination"¹²¹, but it is not a point in any way diminished by its fantastic treatment in Huston's text. Undoubtedly an immersion into the transgressive narrative can run the risk of immersing us

into gratuitous exploitation and, as Prawer observes, we should consider:-

...whether we are not being manipulated to undesirable ends...whether we are not being invaded rather than liberated; whether we are not being offered circus-entertainments in order to distract our attention from abuses we ought to remedy in the social world...¹²²

But clearly these texts, rather than distracting our attention, focus it all the more fully. Only by dragging us to the limits of the acceptable (and perhaps even beyond) can the reader fully experience the precarious danger which structures women's relationship with the aggressively hostile, phallocentric society in which we live. Far from glorying in the affirmation of the latter and far from wallowing pointlessly in bleakness and gloom, all of these texts force us to peer through bloodied fingers, reminding us of how far we become anaesthetised by the threat and tainted by the reality, of horror and terror in our daily lives.

Notes and References:-

- 1) Nancy Huston, *The Story of Omayya* (London: The Women's Press, 1987), 32. .
- 2) James B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 41
- 3) The inclusion of Frame's novel in this section perhaps seems anomalous at first, considering that it was first published in New Zealand as early as 1961. However, it is only since the 1980s that her work has begun to receive full recognition by Anglo-American critics and indeed there is at this moment in time, a current resurgence of critical and popular interest in her work. It is this, along with the fact that the spirit of her text is very much a contemporary one in keeping with the rest of the novels under discussion, that justifies the inclusion of *Faces in the Water* here. Full publication details are as follows: Elizabeth Baines, *The Birth Machine* (London: The Women's Press, 1983); Janet Frame *Faces in the Water* (London: The Women's Press, 1980); Bessie Head *A Question of Power* (London: Heinemann, 1974).
- 4) Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.34
- 5) Dennis Giles, "Conditions of Pleasure in Horror Cinema" in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984), p.39
- 6) Jackson, op. cit., p.34
- 7) Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.145
- 8) This charge was launched against Todorov by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in "Talkin' That Talk", *Critical Inquiry*, 13, 1, 1986, 210. Cited here by Elaine Showalter "A Criticism of Our Own" in *Feminisms* ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1991), 168-188 (p.177)
- 9) This form of the term "Blackwoman" is one often preferred by Black feminist theorists. In joining the two words "Black" and "woman" it encapsulates the difficulty of separating out the two strands of their political and personal identification. The capital "B" nevertheless prioritises the racial aspect as the primary signifier.

- 10) A fuller exploration of the relationship between women writers and this "shadowland" territory can be found in Sarah Lefanu "Sex, Sub-atomic Particles and Sociology" in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* ed. by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), 178-85. This essay takes as its concerns a similar blurring of generic boundaries by women writers of fantasy, this time focusing upon the shading between the classification markers of horror and "hard core" science fiction.
- 11) Twitchell, op. cit., p.16
- 12) Shorty's fears of falling "over the edge" here translate unarticulated psychological fears of insecurity into an empirical perspective. From this point of view they closely parallel the responses provoked by the "visual cliff" experiments of E.J. Gibson and R.D. Walk (first publ. *Scientific American*, 202, 1960, 64-71). Grixti, op. cit., providing a summary of these, comments that "...infants will come to place more trust in their visual perceptions of situations and objects than in the reassurances offered by adults. In these experiments, infants were placed on the centre of a board laid across a sheet of heavy glass which covered patterned material lying directly beneath the glass on one side and, by dropping vertically, several feet below on the other. The infants tested were quite willing to cross over the "solid" side of the table, but the majority refused to venture across the glass-covered "deep" side, even when their mothers encouraged them to do so" (p.156).
- 13) Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination* (Montreal: Eden, 1982), p.101
- 14) Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977). Although now generally considered a bourgeois and outmoded claim by many feminist theorists, Woolf's intrinsic belief that no woman could create without access to both a private income and "a room of one's own" as a working-space aside from the obligations of domestic and child-rearing duties, still strikes a chord with many women today. However, as appears to be the case here, this positive reading of such symbolism also has a darker side to it.
- 15) Victor Burgin, "Fantasy" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 84-88 (p.84)
- 16) As noted by David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (London: Longman, 1980), p.409
- 17) This term referring to that type of film in which violence and bloodshed form its very *raison d'être*.
- 18) Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 1990), p.23.

- 19) Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p.283 (first publ. *Mannerphantasien, 1: Frauen, Fluten, Korper, Geschichte* (Roter Stern, 1977))
- 20) Chris Turner and Erica Carter, "Political Somatics: Notes on Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*" in *Formations of Fantasy* ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Routledge, 1986), 200-213 (p.203)
- 21) See for example Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 164-200. As Wood acknowledges: "If the [American horror] film presents sexuality in general as the object of loathing, it has a very special animus reserved for female sexuality...throughout, sexually aroused preying women are presented with a particular intensity of horror and disgust." (p.194)
- 22) Theweleit op. cit. informs us that the *Freikorps* were the volunteer German army employed for the task of quoshing the working-class rebellion following World War I.
- 23) *ibid*, p.195
- 24) By means of the pelican image, Rosalind Coward's *Female Desire* (London: Paladin 1984) offers an additional dimension to this relationship between the woman and mutilation. In this context Coward's words would imply that Dan's actions here simply mirror those which are typically self-imposed by women themselves: "Like the pelican of the medieval bestiary, it is women who dole out their lifeblood for their offspring. [But] Nowadays we know that the pelicans aren't ripping out their own breasts but are regurgitating food for their young...There's a common fantasy among women that they might be destroyed for the guilty and greedy desires they felt towards their mothers...Women are expected to nourish not to demand" (p.119)
- 25) *ibid*, p.117
- 26) Carter op. cit., pp.4-5
- 27) Theweleit op. cit., pp.191-2
- 28) Barbara Ehrenreich, Foreword in *ibid*, p.xiii
- 29) Pauline Réage, *The Story of O*, trans. Sabine d'Estree (London: Corgi, 1972). First published *Histoire d'O* (J.J. Pauvert, 1954)
- 30) I am indebted here to one of my students for her astute observation that the name Omayya, when reversed, reads "ay-am-O"

- 31) Josef Breuer, "Case 1 - Fraulein Anna O" (Breuer) in *Studies in Hysteria, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. II*, by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), 21-47. A variety of parallels exist between issues and terms prioritised in Huston's novel and observations documented in Breuer's case study of Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O). For example, there is the same implied punning on the two senses of the term "examination", the same preoccupation with dismemberment and mutilation, the same attention to the notion of textual absences and, of course, the same central role played by the absent father.
- 32) S.S. Praver *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror* (Oxford: University Press, 1980), p.77
- 33) Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter and Selected Tales* (New York: Bantam, 1981). Hawthorne's novel, first published in 1850, tells the story of Hester Prynne, an adulteress despised by the puritanical society in which she lives and her child Pearl (the offspring of the liaison). Embroidering for herself the garment decorated with the eponymous symbol of her "transgression", Hester is as effectively branded as if the "A" had been burned into her flesh, and thus functions as the literal embodiment of the woman as evil temptress. However, despite the unfortunate associations surrounding the birth of her daughter, Hester names her Pearl "as being of great price, - purchased with all she had, - her mother's only treasure!" (p.82), a name also carrying stereotypical connotations of purity and innocence of course. Irrespective of the deeply problematic moral stance reflected here, the parallel with Omay's dream seems too significant to overlook in this context.
- 34) The name Cybele is taken from that of the ancient maternal deity. According to Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), 156-7 Cybele's followers were required to undergo ritual circumcision and self-mutilation in order to express their adoration of her. Male worshippers voluntarily chose to cut off their own genitals, while female worshippers likewise cut off one or both breasts. Bettelheim's observation that, on the basis of this, "mutilation of the men was much more severe than that of women; in the male the primary sex characteristics were sacrificed, in the female the secondary" (p.157) might throw some light upon the nature of the "unspoken" relationship between Omay's mother and father. Far more significant for our purposes, however, is Cybele's archetypal role as a mother who inflicts wounds upon her "children".

- 35) Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was of course the first fantastic text to fully explore this theme of the mother as monster. From this perspective the discussions of the text to be found in Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women's Press, 1986) 92-99 and in Anne K. Mellor *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 1988) passim, both explore this theme with far greater insight and in far greater depth than is possible in the context of this thesis.
- 36) Jane Gallop, "The Monster in the Mirror: The Feminist Critic's Psychoanalysis" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* ed. by Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.16
- 37) According to Carroll op. cit. this term refers to beings composed of "the mixture of what is normally distinct" (p.33). Horror monsters are typically transgressive in this respect, a point which clearly parallels the transgressive crossing of "normally distinct" boundary lines by the texts under consideration here.
- 38) see *ibid*, p.43 and p.46
- 39) *ibid*, p.200
- 40) Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets* (London: Women's Press, 1988), p.14
- 41) Shoshana Felman, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy" in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 133-53 (p.134)
- 42) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar 1979 *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984). In this text the authors argue that their eponymous "heroine" attracts a negative label inflicted upon her by patriarchy for being a creative and assertive woman who refuses to conform to the passive stereotype. Taking their starting-point from the "Snow-White" story they take the so-called wicked stepmother as the epitome of this figure, positively reclaiming her as "...a plotter, a plot-maker, a schemer" (p.38) and thus, it is implied, a fairy-tale manifestation of the non-conforming, uniquely creative woman writer.
- 43) Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Death Drive (Lacan)" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 57-9 (p.58)
- 44) Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" in *Art and Literature*, by Sigmund Freud, ed. by Albert Dickson (The Penguin Freud Library Vol.14, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 339-376 (p.366)

- 45) Prawer op. cit., p.76
- 46) Stephen King *Danse Macabre* (London: Futura, 1982), p.66. Cited by Grixti op. cit., p.48. It is worth noting here that King's words clearly function as a reworking of Jackson's definition of the fantastic (see note 87 of the previous chapter)
- 47) Freud op. cit., p.369
- 48) Gilbert and Gubar op. cit., pp.36-7
- 49) Twitchell op. cit. claims "Like the fairy tales that prepare the child for the anxieties of separation, modern horror myths prepare the teenager for the anxieties of reproduction" (p.7). See also Grixti op. cit., p.155
- 50) Biodun Iginla, "Black Feminist Critique of Psychoanalysis" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 31-33 (p.32)
- 51) Giles op. cit., p.48
- 52) Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 18
- 53) Freud "The 'Uncanny'", op. cit., p.363
- 54) Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, op. cit., p.28
- 55) Punter, op. cit., p.410
- 56) Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, op. cit., p.128 and p.141
- 57) see for example "The Company of Wolves", in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* by Angela Carter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 110-118
- 58) Freud, *Totem and Taboo* op. cit., p.34
- 59) Grixti, op. cit., p.38
- 60) Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.14
- 61) *ibid*, p.12
- 62) "Why Look at Women?" in Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), 63-81. Kappeler's argument is a reworking of an essay by John Berger entitled "Why Look at Animals?", published in *About Looking* (Pantheon 1980).
- 63) Lisa Tuttle, "Pets and Monsters: Metamorphoses in Recent Science Fiction" in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* ed. by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), 97-108 (p.106)
- 64) Kappeler op. cit., p.64

- 65) As noted by Jackson, op. cit., p.50
- 66) Jane Gallop *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.22
- 67) See, for example, Kappeler, op. cit., p.199
- 68) Irving Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (London: University California Press, 1976), p.1
- 69) Gaston Bachelard, *Lautréamont* (Paris: [n.pub.] 1939), 170. Cited in ibid, 2
- 70) W.H. New, "The Frame Story World of Janet Frame", *Essays in Canadian Writing*, 29, 1984, 175-91 (p.177)
- 71) Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, op. cit., p.29
- 72) Bruce Kavin, "The Mummy's Pool" in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 3-20 (p.4)
- 73) This alarming account is to be found in Twitchell, op. cit., pp.69-70
- 74) *The Sadeian Woman* being based on the writings of one eighteenth century French aristocrat, while Theweleit's study focuses upon a collective group of early twentieth century military men.
- 75) Frankie Rickford applies this term to the state of masculinity in "No More Sleeping Beauties and Frozen Boys" in *The Left and the Erotic* ed. by Eileen Phillips, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), 139-47 (p.142)
- 76) Twitchell, op. cit., p.7
- 77) As witnessed by the recent spate of "serial killer" films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Cape Fear*.
- 78) Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 42
- 79) Massey, op. cit., p.2
- 80) Equally significant in this descriptive passage is the use of the adjective "unspeakable", which simultaneously implies "disgusting" or "horrific" and, of course, functions as a play on the phrase "unable to speak". Omayra, like the dead chicken, becomes a silenced victim as the rapist's penis is thrust into and down her throat.
- 81) As noted by Tuttle, op. cit., p.105

- 82) For a fuller discussion of the ambivalence of veil and mask imagery see Mary Ann Doane, "Veiling Over Desire: Close-ups of the Woman" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* ed. by Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 105-141
- 83) Praver, op. cit., p.81 also picks up on the ambivalent function of the mask image, arguing that it is a central means via which nightmare uncertainty is communicated.
- 84) Jackson, op. cit., pp.87-8
- 85) Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 43. Cited in Kathleen B. Jones "On Authority: Or, Why Women Are Not Entitled to Speak" in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* ed. by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p.125
- 86) Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.30 (first publ. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Éditions de Minuit, 1977))
- 87) Jackson, op. cit., pp.82-3
- 88) Julia Kristeva "Women's Time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.206
- 89) Grixti, op. cit., p.55
- 90) See Dianne Hunter "Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O" *Feminist Studies*, 9, 3, 1983, 468-486. In another similarity between these two texts Hunter, commenting on Freud and Breuer's case study of Anna O, claims: "The fact that in popular culture the word 'hysterical' is often used in attempts to discredit feminist expression seems to derive from the idea that both hysterics and feminists are 'out of control'" (p.485).
- 91) Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs*, 7, 1, 1981, 36-55 (pp.42-3)
- 92) As typified by masculinist science fiction narratives such as Lester del Rey's "Helen O'Loy" in *The Coming of the Robots* ed. by Sam Moskowitz ([n.p.] [n.pub.],: 1963)
- 93) As noted by Frances Borzello and others "Living Dolls and 'Real' Women" in *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* by Annette Kuhn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) 9-18 (p.14)
- 94) As quoted by J.N. Isbister, *Freud: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p.104

- 95) *ibid.*, p.118-9
- 96) *ibid.*, p.114
- 97) The belief held by nineteenth century physicians (and by no means abandoned by Freud's contemporaries) was that women were particularly susceptible to psychological disorders because of the unstable nature of the female reproductive system. From this perspective it is of course no accident that the Latin term *hyster* (womb) forms the stem of the term "hysteria", as it was commonly considered the organ from which such conditions themselves appeared to stem. For a fuller historical discussion of this see "The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman" in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1985), 51-73.
- 98) Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" in *The New Feminist Criticism* ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986) 292-313 (p.305)
- 99) Roland Barthes *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.37
- 100) An issue discussed at some length by Susan Rubin Suleiman in her article "Writing and Motherhood", in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether (London: Cornell University Press, 1985) 352-377. Referring to Barthes' above-mentioned comment (p.356), Suleiman alerts the reader to the gendered possibilities of what he is saying, but gives him the benefit of the doubt on the basis that the French original, from which she is working, is ambiguously gendered. Richard Miller's English translation, however, renders the statement firmly in the masculine gender, thus reinforcing Suleiman's point.
- 101) Waelti-Walters *op. cit.*, p.81
- 102) Suleiman *op. cit.* pp.361-2
- 103) Twitchell, *op. cit.*, p.16
- 104) Karen Schaafsma, "The Demon Lover: Lilith and the Hero in Modern Fantasy", *Extrapolation*, 28, 1, 1987, 52-61 (p.53)
- 105) Patrick Evans, Patrick "Janet Frame and the Art of Life", *Meanjin*, 44, 3, 1985, 375-383 (p.375)
- 106) The prefatory disclaimer on the flyleaf of *Faces in the Water* states: "Although this book is written in documentary form it is a work of fiction. None of the characters, including Estina [sic] Mavet, portrays a living person." Nevertheless, the novel is commonly read as a largely autobiographical account of Frame's own experiences of hospitalisation within a mental institution, a point which makes Istina's concluding

words particularly poignant. In contrast to this Huston emphasises the factual basis of *The Story of Omayya*, dedicating it to an unnamed rape victim: "...I never forgot that you exist. Truly. Outside the book. Nor that your story actually took place...The truth I have tried to tell is the one I saw on your face, one winter's day, in a court of law. That face has a name, that day has a date, that court has a location..." (Dedication page)

- 107) As noted by Twitchell, op. cit., p.8
- 108) Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.34
- 109) Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, op. cit., p.31
- 110) As noted by Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, op. cit., p.14
- 111) Gubar, op. cit. p.294
- 112) See Chapter three "Pleasures of Repetition" in Bersani op. cit. pp. 40-57
- 113) As noted in Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), p.292
- 114) Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, op. cit., p.6
- 115) Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, op. cit., pp.314-5
- 116) Punter, op. cit., p.410
- 117) Gubar, op. cit., p.300
- 118) Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: Women's Press, 1984), p.11
- 119) Morris Dickstein, "The Aesthetics of Fright" in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 65-78 (p.69)
- 120) Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*, for example, has taken the brunt of a great deal of criticism from certain feminist quarters for dealing with material that is generally considered exploitative and damaging to women. As Carol Siegel observes "Andrea Dworkin and Susanne Kappeler condemn [the text]...on similar grounds, believing that it simply romantically reinscribes the poetics of sexual cruelty that [it]...set[s] out to deconstruct" "Postmodern Women Novelists Review Victorian Male Masochism", *Genders*, 11, 1991, 1-16 (p.10)
- 121) Margaret Whitford, "Rape: Political Perspectives" in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 364-366 (p.365)
- 122) Prawer, op. cit., p.271

CHAPTER 4 - VISIONS OF EXCESS: WOMEN WHO ARE "LARGER THAN LIFE"

And once the old world has turned on its axle
so that the new dawn can dawn, then, ah,
then! all the women will have wings...¹

In the previous two chapters we have been concerned primarily with ordinary characters who find themselves in worlds which become increasingly extraordinary. In contrast to this, in turning to a discussion of women who are "larger than life", we turn to a consideration of extraordinary characters who find themselves displaced within relatively ordinary worlds. The figure of the giant is one which once again emerges out of the fearful fantasies of childhood, deriving from a memory when all around were giants and ourselves little more than dwarves. Leslie Fielder argues that neither children nor the adults who read to them think to identify with the giant of the nursery-tale, eagerly awaiting his downfall "since in our deepest consciousness we remain forever little Jacks"². Perhaps this is true, even for female readers, for the extent to which girls learn early on to translate themselves into male personae if they are to have any active adventures of the imagination at all, is by now well-known and documented. But Fielder goes further than this, assuming that, just as the reader is always the terrified and oppressed little boy, so this fantasy figure is simply a textual version of the immense and, at times brooding father. If this is the case then giants must be consistently male even when not consistently malevolent³. But perhaps this is not the full story. Far

more powerful than a recognition of ourselves as "little Jacks", women know all too well that we live in a society that continually tries to treat us as little girls. From this perspective, the woman who is "larger than life" becomes, not a terrifying Gorgon, but an empowering utopian possibility, a being not simply physically larger than the norm, but in reputation legendary and thus fabulous. Of the novels discussed in this chapter: Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, Claude Tardat's *Sweet Death* and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*⁴; perhaps *Nights at the Circus* and *Sexing the Cherry* place most explicit emphasis upon the relationship between these two cognitive strands of the term.

Carter and Winterson are both, of course, acknowledged manipulators of the real and the unreal. In *Nights at the Circus* this manipulation emerges primarily out of two relationships: that existing between the main female and male characters (Fevvers and Walser), and that existing between Fevvers and the reader. Fevvers is set up as the embodiment of paradox, the "Beautiful lady who is neither one thing nor the other, nor flesh nor fowl..." (p.76). Like Walser and the host of male characters who make the attempt, we are never allowed access to the resolution of Fevvers' mystery. Just as Carter provides one clue suggesting absolute "fact" or absolute "fiction" she follows it up with a contradictory clue which perpetuates, rather than dissipates the confusion. Walser (like the reader) begins with the straightforwardly naive belief that his task is to unearth the truth: of her, of Lizzie's "magic" and of the

narrative as a whole. As we journey through the text, however, such oversimplified attitudes towards the boundaries between fantasy and reality have to be revised.

Winterson's text also shades in and out of levels of reality, setting up character doubles who transgress temporal as well as spatial limitations. Her central character Dogwoman, is therefore simultaneously (in line with the established genre of the fantasy Superwoman) everywhere and yet nowhere. Central to this question is the subject of largeness itself. Analysing the transformative potential of physical size alone, Winterson notes:-

It's one of the mysteries of matter, that fat appears and then disappears again, and all you have to say it ever was are a few stretchmarks and some outsize clothes (SC, 142)

But Winterson's commonsense approach evades the cultural conditioning which so forcibly cripples women's sense of bodily empowerment. To understand fully the fantastic implications of these texts, we have to begin by acknowledging some of the contemporary cultural perspectives on fat and its implications for women and their sense of self-worth. As Naomi Wolf recognises:-

...female fat is the subject of public passion...A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession with female beauty but an obsession with female obedience.⁵

What is so inspirational about these two characters is their cultural disobedience. In transcending set anatomical limits they simultaneously transgress societal rules. In doing so we are immediately alerted to the links one must make

between individual transgression through bodily mass and the mass transgression of limits by women as a body.

In contrast to Winterson, Wolf argues that fat is mythologised as "...expendable female filth; virtually cancerous matter..."⁶. From this perspective one cannot overlook the influence exerted by theorists of excess, the abject and the grotesque and their application to the reading of literary texts; nor the extent to which their approaches offer helpful strategies for reading these novels and their relevance to the relationship between fantasy, transgression and empowerment for women. In *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* Anna Swan remarks:-

My life was a cliché - a farce acted out on an Ohio plain where the marvellous was diminished by the perception of those who dwell within material reality. And I was a prisoner in the thin dimension of ordinary life, looking for a way out. (BMW,306)

These words, aside from the particularised reference to Ohio, encapsulate the position of any of the four central protagonists under consideration here. The boundaries between the fantastic as empowerment and reality as restraint are framed in inseparable terms to anatomical transcendence. All four novelists demonstrate that only by transgressing one set of limits can others also be transcended.

Winterson is particularly noted as a writer whose transgressive characters achieve empowerment through the transcendence of realist limitations. In *Sexing The Cherry* Nicholas Jordan recognises that:-

If you're a hero you can be an idiot, behave badly, ruin your personal life, have any number of mistresses and talk about yourself all the time (SC,133)

but in deconstructing the typical male idol of popularist fiction, his comment sets up a contrast with the many fantastic women of this text. Returning to a theme explored in the previous chapter, one of the interesting fantasy devices Winterson transforms for her own purposes is that of the fairy-tale heroine. The eleven dancing princesses at the centre of the narrative tell their respective stories of freedom from damaging marital constraint, a device which in itself breaches the conventions of the fairy tale form. Not only is each of their supposedly "happy ever after" endings really the beginning of a far more subversive story, but the fact that they tell their own stories, rather than being locked into an objectified silence is in itself revolutionary. Of these the figure of the twelfth dancing princess is perhaps the most interesting precisely because her "larger-than-life" status paradoxically relies upon her invisibility (both physical and in terms of narrative absence). She tells her dancers that: "Through the body, the body is conquered" (p.76), but unlike her sisters she neither tells her own tale nor appears at any stage of the narrative, except in the minds of others. Rather than this physical absence forming a negation of her inspirational qualities, on the contrary she becomes the most transcendent character of the text, as we shall come on to see.

Beyond the Limitations of Definition Through the Body

Throughout the ages the association of women with "the body" has been a common feature of both philosophy and art. Elizabeth Spelman⁷ demonstrates how, from Plato onwards, the great philosophers have drawn a distinction between the soul and the body, the spirit and the flesh, always assigning women to the body/flesh side of the coupling, and preferencing the soul/mind half of the equation as morally superior. This is a concept especially foregrounded in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, in which Anna Swan is seen to be particularly sensitive about the disparity between the size of her body and her head (which is of "normal" size). Referring to herself as "Pinhead", it is interesting that she tries to reduce her own stature in front of the envious women of the Seville community by reference to this disparity:-

DEAR SEVILLE SISTERS: I am 28 years of age and sound in mind and body although I have more body than mind ...but that's true of all of us, isn't it? (BMW,278)

Aware of the women's suspicious attitude towards her fantastic stature, Anna tries to standardise her physical dimensions. Unfortunately, however, in this way she falls straight into the patriarchal trap. The use of the word "us" here is clearly a statement on the human condition, but could be manipulated in this all-female context to refer to the supposedly inferior mental capacities of women in comparison with their fleshly dimensions. Such preconceptions are implied elsewhere in the text by the medical profession as Dr Buckland, in conversation with

Bates, under the guise of apparently paying homage to the creative powers of the female reproductive system, actually manages to devalue it in comparison with the brain:-

...try to consider the uterus along the lines of its twin - the brain... Of course, it has not nearly the number of surface considerations as the organ of reason...and although capable of creating a human being, the uterus cannot legislate a government. Yet...We must respect the terrain for what it is...(BMW,239)

If the body/mind split holds good as far as gender distinctions are concerned, then Buckland's words are once again ambiguous. Taken literally, of course a uterus cannot legislate a government (no more than a brain can produce a child). Read as a synecdochic reference to the woman, however, this can be interpreted as yet another attempt at diffusing the "larger than life" potential of the empowered woman by constraining her within strict anatomical dimensions.

This is consistently the treatment Anna receives at male hands. Having written her tract "Giant Etiquette", Barnum ridicules her with the words "Anna's appeal lies in her size. She is a wonder, the LARGEST OF HER SEX, not a philosopher" (p.110 - my emphasis). Considering this it is perhaps no surprise that Anna's awareness of the head/body split becomes so absolute that she seems at times almost unaware of the connection between them:-

"Isn't it morbid the way the feet move but the head never goes anywhere?" I mused...
"Sitting, I am no more conscious of my head than I am of my own womb, but walking makes me aware of its frozen weight, suspended on my shoulders like a Ming vase. It's unnerving to be aware of the body's monarch. Steady on! Mustn't spill or smash the head!" (BMW,160)

Reduced by patriarchal preconceptions, the vase image is entirely appropriate as a means of representing what Anna's head has become: a decorative but empty vessel.

This obsession with the idea of the woman as vessel, already encountered in the "Shifting Spheres" chapter, projects woman into a state of categorisation in purely bodily terms. Taking upon himself, as a logical extension of this process, the self-imposed right to categorise woman as one of two figures: virgin or whore (and sometimes, somewhat paradoxically, both - a virgin being merely a deceptive or disguised or potential whore); man has also taken upon himself the right to decide whether her body is beautiful or ugly (a value judgement which inevitably permeates her complete sense of self-worth). From this standpoint the next stage becomes to assign her to one or more of the following bodily categories: mother, wife, mistress, whore, bitch; bearing in mind that one man's wife may be another man's mistress, and so on. So the patriarchal system of man's appropriation of woman (in the sense of owning as property or defining/labelling) can be understood.

In this sense Fevvers strives to resist and refuse absolute definition or assimilation by the naive journalist Walser, or indeed any man. Simultaneously the "perfect lady" (p.88) and the "Virgin Whore" (p.55), the contradiction set

up between these two terms is in itself rendered ironic by the fact that, just as Fevvers is neither whore nor virgin (as we discover by the end of the narrative); nor is she perfect as a lady, her womanly existence being constantly threatened by her hybrid status as winged biped. As noted above, Walser's aim is to pin her down to the "truth", a truth which, in line with traditional philosophical approaches, does indeed reside within her body. Fevvers' self-portrayal moves in turn between the roles of: Music Hall/Circus Star, innocent orphan, siren, and finally, "real", ordinary, everyday woman. Her role as star of the Music Hall is perhaps of particular interest in this context because of the recent amount of work which has gone into critiquing the exploitation of women through the imagery of the stage/screen idol and the relationship between exploitation and masculinist fantasies of the woman's body as an object ultimately to be destroyed⁸. To be an idol is, it seems, to be doomed to destruction. Fevvers is intent on reversing this power structure, but how successfully remains to be seen.

Only by transgressing the preconceptions of anatomical realism can such stereotypes be transcended. The fantastic offers such a potential as, according to Bakhtin, do associated notions of the carnivalesque and the grotesque. In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin addresses the concept of carnival as one intrinsically related to rebellion within the body, but his use of the term "body" is a collective rather than an individualist one⁹. Taking this into consideration, it may at first appear anomalous to use Bakhtin's theoretical stance in this context. However, it is

with regard to the role played by grotesque realism within the carnivalesque that this concept is most usefully applied. As Ann Jefferson notes:-

The 'bodily element' [of grotesque realism]...is epitomised by events and activities in which boundaries between bodies, and between bodies and the world, are at their most obscured and eroded: birth, death, copulation, defecation, eating, etc.¹⁰

Fixated by obscenity, violence and death, the clowns in *Nights at the Circus* epitomise Rabelaisian excess, a carnivalesque characteristic which Paulina Palmer considers to be "symbolic of 'the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world'"¹¹, a point clearly worthy of celebration. But the clowns in this text operate fundamentally as a warning to Fevvers that her precarious existence on the edge of the abyss, though transgressive, may tip her over the barrier between "the safe side of terror" (p.151) and the point of no return. In this sense they also embody the dangerous implications of all of these protagonists' transgressive locations on the margins between fantastic empowerment and self-destructive excess.

Throughout this thesis claims have been made for enclosure being one of the central motifs of fantasy writing, a claim which initially seems to refute a Bakhtinian reading of these texts (Bakhtin suggesting that limits are there solely to be transcended). Yet paradoxically this is not the case. The importance of the recognition of the existence of the limit has already been perceived as an essential step towards transgression and,

although Carter may tell us that "Confinement did not suit [Fevvers]" (p.200), we first greet her as a stage presence:-

...prone in a feathery heap...behind tinsel bars...[beginning] to twist the shiny strings of her frail cage in a perfunctory way, mewing faintly to be let out (NC,14)

and continue by tracing, throughout the narrative, her repeated attempts to transcend the double bind which ties her to the role of "bird in a gilded cage". Interestingly Tardat's protagonist also adopts this phrase in *Sweet Death*, following on from this by saying:-

There's a proper age for learning to spread one's wings; I've just about passed it by. (SD,12)

As we might by now expect, the very "larger than life" quality embedded by these women shows them to be restrained by limitations which are, in essence, all too flimsy. As is reiterated above, the power of enclosure cannot be ignored, but recognition of transcendent possibility should also be acknowledged.

In Winterson's text there is a curious preoccupation in the first half of the narrative with the mummifying of flesh, an image which punningly mirrors the significance of the transcendent mother/mummy theme elsewhere in the novel. Beginning as a passing reference Dogwoman makes to an Egyptian tomb seen in London, the image recurs in differing forms, and as articulated by different characters. The second dancing princess recounts how she kills her husband by wrapping bandages from a mummified saint's body around his own, thus causing him to die by suffocation (p.49). The

"larger than life" (legendary) quality of the Egyptian mummy gives it an entirely appropriate presence within this text and as well as featuring in the fantastic anecdote told by the princess, it also features in a further legendary claim for truth. We read that:-

The Puritans...forgot that we are born into flesh and in flesh must remain. Their women bind their breasts...and the men are so afraid of their member uprising that they keep it strapped between their legs with bandages (SC,70)

In both cases the bandaging of the male member very clearly operates on a symbolic level as an ironic attempt to suppress the power of phallocentrism through the image of the mummy/mother, and thus operates as an empowering fantasy, rather than as yet one more example of female enclosure and oppression.

In the case of *Sweet Death* we learn that the central protagonist's obsession with transgressing anatomical limits also emerges out of a recognition of enclosure linked with the concept of the mummy (but this time as a literal reference to the mother). Referring to her childhood she notes that:-

...Mama always kept me away from [children of my own age]...I had fantasies of austere boarding schools alive with whispering and nocturnal conspiracies...I became intoxicated with prisons and their huddled promiscuity...and with solitary confinement in dark closets. (SD,21-2)

Paradoxically free to take up as much space as she wishes at home, Tardat's protagonist longs for physical enclosure to replace the psychological enclosure which is so much more

alienating. It is significant that the word "fantasies" occurs in this context considering that her fantasies are later concerned with the pushing back of the limits of anatomical enclosure through the consumption of cakes and sweets. It has already been implied that the locked rooms and enclosed spaces found in Gothic texts can frequently be read as symbols of enclosed female sexuality. In contrast to the restraint of masculine sexuality offered by Winterson, the desire for confinement demonstrated by Tardat's protagonist perhaps implies a conscious withdrawal from active female sexuality. This might also shed light on what is otherwise a rather obscure passage to be found a couple of pages later:-

In a year, within the walls of this mauve temple...my body will lie candied in a bathtub full of sugar-water, like a mottled iceberg, a bleached Maillol statue. The thighs stuck together. The arms welded to the breasts, and the breasts to each other.
(SD, 24)

The "mauve temple" of this passage refers on one level to her Mother's bathroom, but this becomes nonsensical in the context of the rest of this passage. Taking the reading strategy offered above, however, it becomes a reference to the anatomical enclosures of her own bloated body, rendered mauve by the swelling of tissue and blood vessels. The bathtub will be constructed, not of enamel, marble, or plastic, but of a sugary crust exhaled by the skin. Whereas in the previous chapter, Virginia Woolf's supposedly liberating "room of one's own"¹² becomes a cell, here it becomes a coffin of the flesh formed by the excretions secreted by the protagonist's own body.

Although all four texts offer interesting perspectives on the enclosure issue, *Sweet Death* is perhaps the most fascinating in this respect, it being a novel which documents the progression towards death of a woman who, in transforming herself into a "larger than life" shape, *consciously* destroys herself. Speaking of the woman who is not enchained by the restrictions imposed upon her by a masculinist doctrine which wills women into self-starvation, Naomi Wolf intones the patriarchal warning:-

...if she is not careful she will end up: raped, pregnant, impossible to control, or merely fat. The teenage girl knows this...She learns that making her body into her landscape to tame is preferable to any kind of wildness.¹³

Tardat's protagonist demonstrates, in line with this, that bodily excess is not necessarily (despite what Rabelais or Bakhtin might claim) a libertine celebration of the flesh, but can involve a profound mortification of the body. But to offer a straightforwardly destructive reading of this text is to oversimplify the interesting complexities of the narrative approach with regard to its relationship with the fantastic. Clair Wills has argued that:-

...the bourgeois subject has a "dialogic" relation to carnival - the differentiation by which the subject creates his identity is dependent on disgust, but disgust in its turn bears the imprint of desire.¹⁴

In line with Huston's ambivalent depiction of the woman's terrorised body, in exploring the protagonist's "revolting" body Tardat combines elements of the grotesque alternately with pleasure and eroticism, horror and disgust, and (paradoxically) destruction through empowerment.

In transgressing the limits of accepted notions of conformity all of these "larger than life" women offer a challenge to reductive standards of beauty and stasis. But in doing so it is interesting to note the complex relationship all have with traditional aesthetic forms. Whilst rebelling against such norms, homage to them is often also paid. At times Tardat foregrounds the fact that she is both artist and subject, framing *herself* into poses of self-willed alienation. When she writes in her journal, for example:-

A fat woman encountered on the sidewalk, forcing people to step aside because she took up so much room. A lady dwarf swaddled in fat...A stump of a woman, repulsively ugly...A slob... (SD,98)

it is not at all clear at first whether this is a passage concerning herself, or whether it is a documenting of observations about others. Only gradually is it confirmed as another in a series of depersonalised self-portraits. Even when describing herself through the gaze of others, she seems to have the controlling hand, reversing the usual power relations between surveyor and surveyed, victimising the lookers through her perceptions of herself as framed image:-

[They] give me that clumsy, uneasy look people reserve for cripples and the handicapped. They wish they hadn't glanced my way, but it's too late, they've seen me catch them at it. (SD,11)

In considering the vast amount of work that has gone into demonstrating how the gaze inescapably victimises women, trapping them in their own flesh, it is refreshing to find

that fantasies of the grotesque offer a challenge to such reductionism. Once again, however, Tardat's exploration of the subversion of conventions necessitates that their power be acknowledged before it is challenged. Her protagonist is particularly aware of this, despite her frequent denials:-

The cream flows in a sculpted stream from a star-shaped nozzle. Ladies, this allows you to bring a note of fantasy to your desserts...The anonymous housewife elevated to the dignified status of artist between her dishwasher and her microwave oven...Personally I couldn't care less about aesthetics... (SD,18)

Although mocking the aesthetics of consumption (in the sense of the rhetoric of advertising) here, the challenge seems superficial. Again the use of the term "fantasy" actually highlights this, because it functions to replicate patriarchal wish-fulfilment fantasies of female creativity being constrained within safe limits. And yet, although the aesthetic criteria being applied may be intrinsically traditional, it is the context of the passage that provides the subversive stance, disruption deriving from the uneasy meeting-point between conformity and rebellion. Rather than applying the "sculpted stream" to an elaborately decorated cake, the protagonist plunges it straight down her throat. Much the same mixture of tradition and transgression is offered by a later passage in which the protagonist compares her own body on the beach with that of her mother's sunbathing friends:-

The puny little buttons of their withered breasts would stick up under tiny triangles of satiny material purchased at enormous expense...They'd strike seductive poses on a close-cropped lawn as smooth as their shaved armpits. And on this velvety green carpet I would sit, buttocks squashed. My breasts would ooze down on either side of me like liquified gelatin... I'd revel in the horrified stares of these women as they wondered where that gurgling noise was coming from, that noise like boiling oil. My frying body... (SD,31)

As with the former example, although a jaundiced reading of established aesthetic norms is offered here, subversion emerges out of the juxtaposition of the women's svelt forms with the protagonist's horrific excess. Few would argue with the (albeit patriarchal) notion that this juxtaposition combines the aesthetics of the beautiful with those of the grotesque. Significantly however, it is the presence of the protagonist's form which, in itself, renders the beauty of their image grotesque by infiltrating the frame and thus usurping the power of the gaze. In both passages the grotesque aspect actually emerges out of the meeting-point of two sign-systems. Silvia Bovenschen has noted that the movement towards a new feminist aesthetics requires a dynamic relationship between "...conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting" established forms.¹⁵ From this perspective we see Tardat's text as one which functions within such a dynamic relationship. Her notion of aesthetic norms requires a filtering of the gaze through the patriarchal lens, but it is the contextualisation of the image that problematises convention.

This issue of the aesthetics of the grotesque is further foregrounded in *Sweet Death* by the references to the photographer Diane Arbus, whose *graphic illustrations* of supposed female monstrosity work to deconstruct patriarchal notions of the beautiful female body in precisely this way. Arbus, whose work Susan Sontag claims:-

...lined up assorted monsters and borderline cases - most of them ugly; wearing grotesque or unflattering clothing; in dismal or barren surroundings...¹⁶

prioritises, once again, the peripheral territory of categorical transgression. When applying this judgement to all four texts under consideration, we recall that each of these "larger than life" women is a "borderline" case. All four stand on the meeting-point of a series of boundaries, including those between: living legend and sordid freak, truth and falsity, and the real and the fantastic. Once again it is the oscillation between spheres caused by this marginal location which is the source of their fascination for the reader, and it is precisely this disturbed fascination that Tardat is attempting to aestheticise here. One of Tardat's protagonist's frequent disclaimers concerns her own comments on Arbus' work, claiming that in constructing framed and sanitised images, the true subversive potential of the subject-matter is lost:-

Who will tell the truth about what it's like to be overwhelmed by meglomaniac breasts, to feel the squishiness of a flabby roll of fat, to flaunt the outrageous indecency of a loudly gurgling belly? (SD,86)

But in common with Arbus' images Tardat's protagonist overtly and frankly flaunts the grotesque possibilities of

the body as aesthetic object. For this reason in order to maximise her own potential visibility Tardat's protagonist shuns traditional freakshow environments, noting that: "Here everyone looks a bit like a monster, and no one notices me." (p.83) In similar vein to the perceived distinction drawn between the nude and the naked body¹⁷, this theory of the aesthetic points to the perceived gap between fantasies of monstrosity and lived reality, but also re-emphasises the proximity already referred to between positive legendary status and self-willed victim, the distinction between the latter being based on the flimsiest of limitations. After all, it can be said of *Sweet Death* that the nameless protagonist's drive towards display is, despite her above-mentioned disclaimer, that of the sideshow freak who, in recognising her own otherness, decides to reconcile herself to it by becoming a treat for consumption on and by the marketplace. But to carry this through one must overlook her own function as usurper and subverter of the gaze. The passage quoted above raises the issue of autonomy once again. The use of the word "megalomaniac" in this context is suggestive of empowerment deriving from a body actively out of control as opposed to an image passively frozen within the rigidly fixed limits of the artist's frame.

But transgressive images of the grotesque body out of control do not always convey empowerment, as demonstrated by a scene describing the poverty-stricken body of the Five Points slum in Swan's text. As Anna Swan travels by on her way to the American Museum she observes:-

The dwellings...were infested with strange pink shapes. As I looked, flesh reassembled into heads, legs, arms. I witnessed, Angus, what I know to be beautiful - the bodies of humans - as something repulsive and misshapen. (BMW,90)

This overspill, which falls entirely within Wolfgang Kayser's definition of the grotesque as:-

...the familiar and apparently harmonious...alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence¹⁸

is decidedly lacking in empowering force, despite the fact that it remains in keeping with the concept of borderlines and transgression mentioned above. Transgression emerges out of the fact that the structures of the houses, built in order to shelter and compartmentalise the inhabitants into neat family units, are blown apart by the overcrowding within. The resulting spillover of fragments of the body clearly operates as a symbol for the collective urban spillover and social fragmentation which the people themselves represent. Although depicted in true Bakhtinian style, being an image of grotesque realism in its *collective* as opposed to its *individualist* aspect, what it lacks is Bakhtin's idealist notions of carnivalesque abandon. Celebratory readings of visual excess on either an individualised or a collective level, as well as requiring the presence of a dynamic relationship between object and gaze, and the inability of the frame to control the image, are also primarily dependent upon a context of fantastic empowerment. Transgression is not, in and of itself, transcendent.

Dogwoman's relationship with her own grotesque body reinforces the significance of narrative context from this perspective. A repeated question posed by her in Winterson's text is "How hideous am I?". When followed by the realist self-portraiture:-

My nose is flat, my eyebrows are heavy, I have only a few teeth and those are a poor show, being black and broken. I had smallpox when I was a girl and the caves in my face are home enough for fleas (SC,19)

we, albeit reluctantly, accept the validity of the judgement on established aesthetic grounds. From this perspective, once again, the grotesque is not empowering, it is simply grotesque. And yet elsewhere in the text it seems that her relationship with the grotesque depends more upon the intervention of the fantastic than upon realist descriptions, and on those occasions the transgression of aesthetic norms demonstrates all too clearly how authority can be subverted and control seized. Travelling in disguise, Dogwoman seeks entrance to the King's trial sitting in a wheelbarrow dressed as a tramp. Finding a soldier barring the entrance to the building she counters the latter's demands that she leave her wheelbarrow behind by informing him:-

...I have the Clap and my flesh is rotting beneath me. If I were to stand up, sir, you would see a river of pus run across these flags. The Rule of Saints cannot begin in pus...It is the stench of a three days' dead dog and not for the noses of the tender. (SC,72-3)

Retaining the metaphor of fluidity encountered in the previous chapter, we see that Kristeva's work on the abject

casts light on such anatomical excess as transgressive empowerment. Abjection, within which "looms...one of those violent, dark revolts of being...ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable"¹⁹ is a concept particularly relevant to the grotesque and transgressive concerns of the fantastic; but also lends itself to an exploration of the borderline quality of the "larger than life" woman. When Fevvers is referred to as "Queen of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species" (p.81) she is located intrinsically within a state of abjection, a state which she consistently embodies due to her definition depending upon that part of her body which is neither inside nor outside, neither self nor Other: her wings. Defining the "deject" (the one by whom the abject exists) as:-

A deviser of territories...[who] never stops
demarcating his universe whose fluid
confines...constantly question his
solidity...²⁰

the precarious position within which each of these "larger than life" women finds herself is foregrounded. When, at the beginning of the text, Carter describes Fevvers in the act of pouring a glass of champagne:-

...topp[ing] herself up with such a lavish
hand that foam spilled into her pot of dry
rouge, there to hiss and splutter in a bloody
froth (NC,12)

the extract reads, out of context, as if Fevvers' own juices are bubbling over, unable to withstand containment by the skin. In this sense it anticipates a moment described by

Fevvers herself towards the end of the narrative when she comments:-

I spread. In the emotion of the moment I spread. I spread hard enough, fast enough to bust the stitching of my bearskin jacket. I spread; bust my jacket; and out shot my you-know-whats. (NC,251)

Here, the repetition of the phrase "I spread" (the verb itself being more commonly associated with fluid rather than solid matter), combined with the more usual association of emotional excess with fluid excess (in the form of the flowing of tears, the racing of the blood, or the stimulation of sexual secretions) means that, although this passage deals in actuality with the expansion of solid matter, Fevvers' solidity is here, as ever, called into question. The concept of fluidity runs throughout Kristeva's work on abjection, but she is careful to stress that it is not the secreted or excreted matter that is in itself abject but, as in the passage quoted above, the process involved in the transgression of bodily boundaries by such matter. With regard to literal fluid excess Kristeva quotes Mary Douglas as saying:-

Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body.²¹

In Kristeva's work, however, such secretions tend by inference to be associated with the male deject, the only explicitly feminine role being attributed to the castrating mother, cause of the deject's repression. At first glance Swan's approach also seems to equate abjection with the masculine. Beginning with Anna's father's refusal to

restrict his "daily waterings" (p.14) to the woods (and thus respect boundaries of another kind); moving on to the ejaculatory rain of spittle aimed at Anna, firstly by the cigar-smoking men in the hotel lobby in New York (p.70) and later by her husband Bates; and concluding with the grateful tears with which Ingalls soaks Anna's thighs on the cliff-top (p.248) the men by whom Anna is surrounded seem to form a deject(ed) body indeed. And yet all is not as it at first seems. Although Anna's mother decries Bates on the grounds that he: "...takes no responsibility for his bodily juices" (p.287) we know, as he later admits to Anna, that he is "...not capable of manly spending" (p.297). "Spending", as Madeleine Gagnon testifies²², is a feminine concept and one which, although suppressed within the parameters of the patriarchal text, one might expect to flow freely within these transgressive narratives. Thus Anna it is with whom the truly transgressive powers of abjection are associated, fluid references being made to sweat, menstrual blood, urine, vaginal secretions, the broken waters of childbirth and breast milk. In all cases the traversing of such fluidity from the inner to the outer signifies a transgression of another kind, as demonstrated by her body's abject response to her violation by Hubert's icicle:-

Pain intermingled with waves of voluptuous feeling. My senses were confounded; I couldn't tell if I was hot there or cold, nor could I discern pain from pleasure. The alternating sensations thrilled and frightened me...I realized the icicle had melted into a puddle in my unspeakables.
(BMW, 34)

The blurring of boundaries set up by the transformation from solid to fluid (the latter, in accordance with Kristeva's

reading of abjection, being neither part of nor other to her anatomy) parallels the blurring of boundaries as the distinction between senses begins to break down. But the transgression of limits brought about by this act also accompanies the crossing of the threshold into sexual activity (literalised by the rupture of the boundary formed by the hymen).

Tardat's protagonist, remembering watching an argument between her mother and the Spaniard (a scene in itself transgressive because it irrevocably challenges her formerly preconceived notions of her own familial structures), equally finds the memory dominated by abjection through the presence of a large boil which she recalls having "taken over half my chin" (p.107), pus oozing from it. Just as she feels herself to be a foreign (abject) body scarcely contained within the all too flimsy limits of the family unit, so too the boil becomes a perfect example of the abject (foreign) body which, whilst present within and contained by the limits of the anatomy, is simultaneously alien to it and resistant to containment by the outer layer of skin (here demonstrated by the mucus which is excreted from it).

Although in both Swan's and Tardat's text abjection seems to conspire against the "larger than life" woman, Irigaray's work on sexual difference offers the possibility of a positive reading of the woman's body as a site of abjection, prioritising the concept of mucosity as symbolic of the transgressive potential of female excess. Just as these "larger than life" women are perceived to be located

on a variety of boundaries, so Irigaray positions the mucus associated with active female sexuality in accordance with the threshold motif. Arguing that the concept of sexual difference itself is one based on the meeting-point between boundaries "...both horizontal and vertical, terrestrial and celestial" she notes that without the transgressive presence of mucus, the body lies inert and corpse-like²³. Only through fluid excess can growth and transformation take place.

The concept of metamorphosis introduced in the previous chapter also ties in with this notion of the blurring of limitations and fantastic transformations of the grotesque body. Kayser claims that hybrid forms are one of the prevailing elements of the grotesque in art and literature²⁴, and it is clear that these texts all, in one way or another, address the concept of metamorphosis and its significance to the transgressive figure of the "larger than life" woman. In a sense these characters are always hybrid forms, oscillating between the mundane and the legendary, the one being continually subverted by the other. Reference has already been made to the necessity to distinguish between willed metamorphosis and metamorphosis which takes place against the protagonist's wishes. In *Sweet Death* the first of these cases clearly applies. The protagonist watches and documents the step by step transformation of her own body, displaying the metamorphic process before us as readers. Rejecting her previous love of books as a means of expanding her mind, it becomes clear that expansion of the body is the only remaining strategy open to her. Incapable of genuinely transforming her life, she can only transform

herself through death. The autonomy of this act is reinforced when she rejects any attempt on the part of the friendly student to step in and alter her course. Placing his hand upon hers across the table, she withdraws hers and concentrates with renewed vigour upon the delicacy on her plate:-

The Beast gets her back up whenever someone draws near. In her beastly body, the Beast shelters neither a beautiful soul nor a charming princess. Moreover, the Beast has no other desire within her palace of sugar than to give the lie to those fairy tales. She refuses the magic kiss that would mean release from that shape of hers. (SD,55)

In refusing to cast the student in the role of Prince Charming, she refuses to be transformed back into conventional womanhood. The adoption of the third person narrative here simultaneously reinforces the fact that she is projecting *herself* into an alien form. In this context the phrase "release from that shape of hers" takes on additional ironic significance. The student desires to release her from her "larger than life" stature into "normality". However, in keeping with fictional approaches to the fantastic, "normality" is itself an alien concept, and it is the latter that she desires to release herself from, not the former. This singleminded control of the metamorphic is not necessarily shared by the protagonists of the other texts under consideration, however. In *Sexing the Cherry*, for example, Dogwoman's 1990s double informs us that:-

I imagined my parents' house as a shell to contain me. An environment suitable for a fantastic creature who needed to suck in the warmth and nourishment until it was ready to shrug off the shell and burst out...I was a monster in a carpeted egg. There I go, my shoulders pushing into the corners of the room, my head uncurling and smashing the windows. (SC, 141)

In this scene, with its powerful evocations of *Alice in Wonderland* and anatomical transcendence of artificial structures, nurturance turns into enclosure, the monster bursting out, rebelling against the established norms. Anna Swan's difficulty also lies in the fact that metamorphic status is inflicted upon her at entirely inappropriate moments. Her memories of her traumatic entrapment by fire are punctuated by images of anatomical fragmentation and disparate metamorphoses into a series of performing curiosities for the delighted crowd:-

...I wept for myself and the selves I was in my growth, including the AGORAPHOBIC VICTIM, who cowered as the tackle ball broke the museum wall, the VICTORIAN LADY hauled like a pachyderm over the heads in the street, the GIANT ACTRESS who smiled as she was lowered to the roaring crowds and, finally, the BIG SURVIVOR who failed to convey her waters to the fiery wimbles until the festival was over. (BMW,145)

In Swan's text, naming in block capital letters always accompanies the assimilation of a staged identity (suggestive of the performing freak). Perhaps it is the recognition of the tragedy of unwilling metamorphosis involved in such exploitative display tactics that makes Anna particularly unhappy about Barnum's use of Mimi the monkey to "ape" female behaviour:-

[Her] furry bottom was exposed under her frilly tutu each time she vaulted on and off the back of a trotting bulldog. I frowned sternly... (BMW,98)

It is unclear from the wording of this passage whether Anna's distaste derives from the humiliation of the animal or from its projected proximity to the female form. In a sense, however, the two facets are inseparable. The grotesque aspect of the image emanates from the hybridisation of both, rendering both elements grotesque and transforming both monkey and woman into a monstrous perversion deriving from:-

The distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole.²⁵

It is interesting that, as an extension of this, Ingalls has a nightmare later in the text in which he metamorphoses into a very similar hybridisation of the female form:-

I follow [Anna] up a shadowy passageway and notice she looks about the size of a normal woman. There's nothing unusual about her and I see it's me the warders are staring at so I ask the giantess for a mirror...I look in and see a hairy ape face with deformed lips and a wide, squat nose...I am so ugly I want to die, then I look down and see breasts poking through my suit vest. Dear God, I am a woman. (BMW,226)

Here it becomes evident that, although Ingalls perceives his reflection as intrinsically horrible in its blurring of the limits between the human and the animal, the acquisition of femaleness almost operates as an explanation for such monstrous abjection. It becomes, for Ingalls, the ultimate ingredient of a grotesque manifestation and, as in Sweet

Death, the focus of the horror is once again upon the enlarged breast. But what makes this passage of particular significance is the contrast emphasised between Anna and Ingalls. Following so closely after the copulation scene between these two characters, the "shadowy passageway" up which Anna leads Ingalls is of course her own vagina. The latter's fears (in the typical nightmare style of true masculinist paranoia) is that, in assimilating his penis, Anna has contaminated him with her own monstrosity.

A significant part of the denial of empowerment suffered by these women resides in their depiction as freaks or monsters, a concept common to all four narratives. Throughout Swan's text Anna is humiliated and tormented by having to perform for the public gaze. The above-mentioned scene illustrates how, even aside from her stage act, she finds herself in situations whereby others command her to play the role of the freak for their amusement. Significantly, Anna's size is considered to conspire against her femininity, a position which, in itself, locates her within the guise of the monster. Swan explores this in a variety of ways using, like Baines, the themes of pregnancy and birthing to symbolise the engorged female body as monstrous deformity. During pregnancy Anna describes herself as "failed...female and flawed" (p.242), the alliterative content demonstrating how closely Anna has assimilated the connection between the three terms as a basis for her self-image, her pregnancy merely highlighting pre-existent monstrous tendencies. The attitudes of those closest to her seem to reinforce this. Although Apollo calls her a "goddess who is bearing fruit" (p.233) he uses the distance set up by

the deification as a convenient means of disguising his lack of physical attraction towards her in her enlarged state. Likewise her mother, shunning her husband's advances after giving birth to Anna "...didn't want [him] to remember how big a woman's body gets when it has to!" (pp.9-10).

Tardat's protagonist, on the other hand, in no way feels the desire to conceal the revolting state of her own anatomy. Her fantasy is to shock others by the power of her difference and, again, her relationship with her mother is of significance here. Kim Chernin argues that daughters' bodily rebellion against their mothers usually takes the form of developing "...lean, male bodies in the hope that they might escape from the mother's destiny..."²⁶. Part of the shock tactics offered in *Sweet Death*, as already implied, does reside in the protagonist's rebellion against the maternal associations of the breast. This does not manifest itself through reduction, however, but through transformation into a monstrous parody:-

I've set the scale on the edge of the table, which is exactly chest-high for me. Blouse unbuttoned to reveal my bare breasts, I heft them up vigorously, taking inspiration from the firm grips depicted in scenes of flemish merrymaking. My breasts have the supple consistency of those rubber dolls children play with...I hoist them up to my nose, sniff them, examine the smooth transparent skin stretched around them, pink as a freshly scrubbed sow, veined with blue and delicate red nervures... My bosom is too heavy with accumulated fat, it overflows the sides of the scale. The indicator needle...is completely covered by my vast twin pillows. I'll never know precisely how well stacked I am. (SD,96-7)

This is an interesting passage because of the multiplicity of discourses it incorporates. The overt references to the

aesthetics of the carnivalesque immediately suggest the power and positive voluptuousness of the fully developed female body, suggestive in itself of transgression and sensuality. This is reinforced (although in a rather different way) by the detailed descriptions of "smooth, transparent skin" and "blue and delicate red nervures" which are likewise suggestive of a pleasure in the minutia of her otherwise ebullient form. In contrast to this, however, are terms such as "stacked", suggestive of coarse and reductive masculinist attitudes towards powerful female sexuality, and the ironic comparison of her own flesh with the dead matter of the child's toy. Once again, it is out of this juxtaposition of discourses that a transgressive monstrosity emerges. As Kristeva notes:-

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.²⁷

The corpse is the most transgressive of all manifestations of abjection because it invades life with the tainting presence of death. In referring to herself simultaneously through the discourses of fecundity and foetidness, Tardat's protagonist places *herself* in a position of monstrous abjection, existing in a paradoxical state of non-existence on both sides of the boundary (a contradictory position to which we will return later in the context of a consideration of the function of mirror imagery within these texts).

Unfortunately the monstrous woman, however transgressive, is not free from fearful fantasies of the monstrous man. Left alone with Bates on their wedding night,

Anna transforms Martin's body through the power of her imagination into a creation of mythically threatening proportions, fighting in her mind with the power of her own projections:-

Now he is very much awake...my skull is drumming with my hymeneal refrain: Bigger than you, bigger than you...Martin moves closer... Even a monster such as Cyclops was half angel...Martin, I will not walk backwards, in obeisance, to the bridal bed...my skin may crawl with you, monster man, and my hair stand on end, but I, the BIGGEST MODERN WOMAN OF THE WORLD, will not undergo an eclipse of the spirit. (BMW,208-9)

This gothic scene, in which Bates has taken on "larger than life" status for Anna is interesting because, grotesque though his form is, his empowerment is entirely dependent upon being fuelled by Anna's fantasies. The anti-climax (narrative and sexual) that follows, reinforces our awareness of the narrative's message elsewhere: that monstrosity resides in the psyche, not the flesh.

This is a recognition also explored from a fantastic perspective in *Sexing the Cherry*. Winterson demonstrates that where fantasy intersects with reality, many women are confronted with an uncomfortable image of the split self which renders them monstrous:-

When I'm dreaming I want a home and a lover and some children, but it won't work. Who'd want to live with a monster? I may not look like a monster any more but I couldn't hide it for long. I'd break out, splitting my dress, throwing the dishes at the milkman if he leered at me and said, 'Hello, darling.'... He'd see her, the other one, lurking inside. She fits, even though she's so big. (SC,144-5)

This image of the empowering and empowered "larger-than-life" alter-ego who resides within every woman, bears unfortunate superficial similarities to masculinist pulp fantasy creations such as "The Incredible Hulk". In this context it is hard to see monstrosity as anything other than dangerously reductive. Nevertheless, even within this context, the anatomical transformation which results in the split clothing could be read as a transgressively liberating one. Only through bursting out of enclosures can our alter-egos go free.

A glimpse of such empowerment through monstrosity is afforded in Swan's text. Anna, staring down at New York from a tower block, wills the city to shrink to a more manageable size, fantasising herself into a position of strength:-

...from Fifth Avenue to Battery Park, [it] dwindles to the size of a tourist trinket...Angrily I reach down and pick up the miniature town and in a long, ladylike toss, pitch New York as far as I can out into the Atlantic Ocean... (BMW,134)

If the former scene from *Sexing the Cherry* is reminiscent of a metamorphosis into "The Incredible Hulk" then this is surely reminiscent of a metamorphosis into King Kong. This is particularly interesting because the "King Kong" syndrome has been referred to as a fantasy exploration of:-

The dark secret behind human nature...The threat to man...[lying] in his own animality.²⁸ (my emphasis)

Lisa Tuttle's exploration of the empowering potential offered by the woman's metamorphosis into animal form, is once again applicable here, and this is where the

significance of the application of the act comes to the fore. Rather than seizing and terrorising a diminutive female as does the masculinist version, here the female monster grasps the phallic proportions of the New York skyline and, note, "tosses them off" into the sea. So Anna employs the device of the monstrous alter-ego in order to use her "larger than life" status as a means of wreaking havoc upon the patriarchal status quo.

The Erotics of Excess and the Passion to Consume

As implied above, though at times grotesque and monstrous, all of these women are eroticised through the pleasures of disgust. Both Fevvers and Anna Swan could be considered comic parodies of the "larger than life" voluptuous female artiste. Speaking of the former, Walser points out that:-

At close quarters...she looked more like a dray mare than an angel... though they said she was 'divinely tall', there was, offstage, not much of the divine about her...Her face, broad and oval as a meat dish, had been thrown on a common wheel out of coarse clay...there was enough of her to go round, and some to spare. (NC,12)

The idolisation of the (usually female) body involves, paradoxically, the complete dehumanisation of that very same female body by turning living flesh and blood into a two-dimensional stage/screen image. An essential part of this dehumanisation process is the concealment or removal of all kinds of unpleasant bodily functions inherent to the human anatomy. In contrast to this, Carter is at pains here to stress Fevvers' complete anatomical reality: from the

"ripping fart" she emits around the room, to the bundle of stockings Walser accidentally dislodges and which "introduced a powerful note of stale feet" into the room. In contrast to Plato's loathing of the "fleshly" woman²⁹, Walser discovers that he is strangely intoxicated by her, her story, and her environment:-

...she stretched herself suddenly and hugely...As she raised her arms, Walser, confronted by stubbled, thickly powered armpits, felt faint...A seismic erotic disturbance convulsed him - unless it was their damn' champagne...If he got out of her room...away from her presence...if he could fill his lungs just the one time with air that was not choking with 'essence of Fevvers', then he might recover his sense of proportion. (NC,52)

The opening of *Sweet Death*, in similar style, immediately hints at an acknowledgement that pleasure can be found in disgust:-

...my chocolate kim cone dribbled down my neck onto my skirt in thick, devastating streams...The precious liquid glued the fabric to my thighs ...Had I been thin and supple, I might have leaned down to lick [it] off my lap. But my tongue is now exiled from the rest of my body. (SD,2)

But desire and disgust are not solely dependent upon autoeroticism in this text. Desire for the neglectful mother is couched in similar terms. Bersani notes the significance of the olifactory drives with regard to infantile sexuality³⁰, and within *Sweet Death*, the protagonist refers on several occasions to "olifactory indiscretions" which she shares with Zohra, her surrogate mother. Furs are a recurring motif in this text, and carry with them a sense of bestial eroticism which, when used as an artificial

enhancement for human sexuality render the latter grotesque and barbaric. Associated with the figure of the Mother, the protagonist's search for intimacy through the combined scents of human, animal and artificial perfumes leads to a perverse pleasuring in "olifactory indiscretions":-

...the pelt has been strongly impregnated with Mama's colognes, and the animal scent persists only in the sleeves, at the armpits... to nuzzle my face deep into the fur, to sniff every little tuft, to luxuriate in the dazzling, thick softness. Fur orgies, that's what Mama had... (SD,14)

In pleasuring in the death of the flesh, this scene projects onto the Other the pleasure she derives from the inevitable destruction of her own revolting flesh. The primeval elements of the description take us back to Bersani. The intrinsic link between the senses of taste and smell is a scientifically-proven fact. Repeatedly the olifactory (as with all desire in this text) is linked with oral gratification. Rejecting the chocolates her mother buys her she admits:-

...I would willingly have munched on ambergris and musk if there had been candies in those flavours. (SD,42)

But the choice of the terms ambergris and musk return us to the eroticism of bestiality because they are two fragrances which combine the fleshly (being glandular secretions) with olifactory desire. On reaching adulthood the transference between orality and the olifactory is complete. Obsessively sniffing at Zohra's neck, she compares it to "...flaky pastry, her kind eyes as sweet as...almond cream" (p.62),

and in an extremely ritualistic scene, pleasures in the olifactory only as it is combined with oral gratification:-

Using a counting rhyme...I let chance select
the pot I would venture to open...[I]
disliked only one. When the lot fell on this
bizarre mixture of cucumber and avocado, I
cheated...I'd have given all the sweets in
all the capitals of the world for just one of
those little jars perfumed with iris,
honeysuckle, and freesia. Face creams that
smelled so good I would have eaten them.
(SD,58-9)

Autoeroticism in Tardat's text takes the form of masturbation through mastication. There is an obsessive fascination with the body here which alternates between Irigaray's sense of wonder³¹ and a complete denial of the self which takes place via the concealment of the flesh within its own folds. Pleasuring in her own flesh she notes:-

I sucked down some condensed milk... standing
over the mirror with my legs wide
apart...Unctuous and golden honey in a chubby
little jar... (SD,56)

The masturbatory implications here are rendered explicit by the confusion in terminology between flesh and food. The "chubby little jar" can be read as a description of her own body, particularly when considered as a "honey-pot". Immediately prior to this, the protagonist describes another act of gorging herself on honey resulting in "...a trickle of sugary warmth flowing from inside of me" (p.56) suggestive as much of sexual stimulus deriving from the pleasures of gluttonous excess as it does literal sugary injection. But elsewhere her orgies of consumption seem

determined to suppress rather than stimulate sexual pleasure:-

...soon I'll lose sight of my sex. It'll be tucked away in a jewel box of soft and curdled flesh... I placed a hand mirror on the floor tonight to examine this red hole between my legs, an entrance that has never been used and never will be by anyone, not even me. (SD,56)

Ironically, and unlike in the three other novels under discussion, as this woman expands in size those organs which define her femaleness are left behind, figuratively suggesting that her largeness conspires against sexual gratification and so transformation into an assertive and empowered woman.

But as well as eroticism emerging out of excess, so female sexuality itself is portrayed in terms of an excessive appetite that cannot be fulfilled. Irigaray claims sexuality to be "larger than life" for all women, describing it as "A sort of expanding universe to which no limits could be fixed..."³². In this respect as in so many others, the characters under discussion here function merely as a fantastic magnification of women in general. Although in other respects constrained by misplaced notions of feminine conformity, Anna Swan does have a refreshingly active attitude towards sexual desire and related fantasies. Repeatedly disappointed by masculine ignorance and conceit, as for Tardat's protagonist, only masturbation can offer her consistent fulfilment:-

...I often stroked the silken bulb of flesh between my thighs until it was the size of my big toe and I thought the Cobequids would split apart and my sleeping family leap from their beds, shrieking with fear over my noises of pleasure. (BMW,32)

The enlargement of her clitoris is the one aspect of her own anatomical growth with which Anna is at peace, enlargement here being perceived as totally in proportion with the "norms" of female sexuality.

In response to this, throughout Swan's narrative several characters of both sexes attempt to cut Anna down to size, denial of her sexuality forming a primary target for this. Her mother, discovering her in the act of pleasuring herself, punishes her by washing her mouth out with soap. Claiming that Anna's actions "cheapened the love of men and women" (p.32), the enforced penetration of the surrogate vagina with the sanitising soap suggests that only through coitus with the male can Anna be "cleansed" of her "larger than life" urges, and limitations be placed upon her "universe in expansion". Indeed to some extent this prophecy comes true with Ingalls. Although he is the most satisfying of her lovers, a disturbingly reductive dialogue takes place after they have had intercourse on the cliff-top. He recounts:-

...Anna asked me if I found her normal and I said in every respect ...Then she wept quite a bit and said she had always fancied herself the pleasure-giver but she saw now that she had been wrong and if she liked to please me it would follow that I would like to please her. (BMW,248)

Anna's consolationist desires for normality here are clearly reductive of her anatomical excess, her stated desire to

please merely acting as a manifestation of self-willed conformity. The narrative, filtering her responses through Ingalls' words, provides the final means via which her desires become muted and tamed. What is "normal" about this scene is the defensive masculinist response to "larger than life" female sexuality, a response also to be found in *Nights at the Circus*.

Despite himself, Walser is strangely infatuated by Fevvers' presence, which alternately arouses and repulses him in a manner he clearly does not understand, and over which he has no control. It is significant that the physical effect she has upon him is so closely linked to whether or not he perceives her as a fantasy or everyday being, Fevvers being the embodiment of a fantastic combination of the two. At the end of chapter five, Fevvers "...yawned, not like a whale, not like a lioness, but like a girl who has stayed up too long (p.87). But at the start of chapter three Walser, left alone with Fevvers while Lizzie goes out for some food, is intimidated by his solitary proximity to this "giantess" (p.51) who might devour him sexually. When she yawns on this occasion, he notes that it is:-

...not as a tired girl yawns... [but] with prodigious energy, opening up a crimson maw the size of that of a basking shark, ...it seemed she intended to fill up all the mirror, all the room with her bulk. (NC,52)

But although the term "giantess" here reminds us of Anna Swan, it is in Winterson's text that we are confronted most obviously with the full devouring force of "larger than life" female sexuality. Dogwoman shares in Anna's anatomical advantages over the inadequately engorged phallus and once

again figures as a physical manifestation of Irigaray's words:-

...[I] cannot say that I felt anything at all, though I had him jammed up to the hilt...he complained that he could not find the sides of my cunt and felt like a tadpole in a pot...I took a giant breath and squeezed...and when I strained up...I saw I had pulled him in, balls and everything.
(SC,120-121)

Dogwoman, unlike Anna however, remains uncompromised by the prevailing desire to conform, and the humour of this textual passage in no way detracts from the fantastic possibilities of Dogwoman's own anatomical passage. Following this, reference is made to Dogwoman's "orange" being oversized for the man's mouth. As well as reminding the reader of an earlier reference (p.21) to Dogwoman's ability to fit a dozen oranges in her mouth at any one time (thus demonstrating her superior consumptive potential), the word "orange" here is clearly set up as a reference to the engorged clitoris. Once again, however, such celebratory excess will not stand unchallenged. Despite Dogwoman's dismissive comment "They call me the Dog-Woman and it will do" (p.3), the pejorative sexual connotations of the word "dog" as applied within masculinist discourse to refer to "an unattractive or boring girl or woman"³³ are significant in this context. When coupled with this potential for active female sexuality, the impotent and over-awed response on the part of the male is that commonly witnessed in popularist comedy settings. Richard Dyer, referring to this construct as the "harriidan" observes:-

Harridans do not have to be grotesque to be funny; it is enough for them to be sexually alert...³⁴

Like "dog" the term "harridan" is one riddled with reductionist associations. But in both cases the aggressiveness contained within these terms is clearly the product of fear. The comic harridan reverses the usual role of male sexual predator and female victim, and takes on terrorising possibilities through her paradoxical existence as "...a product of a society which loathes the human body"³⁵. If such fear can be instilled by the "human" body, then the potential for terror residing in "larger than life" female excess must be fantastic indeed.

Masculinist fears of the devouring potential of the "larger than life" woman seem fully realised in Winterson's treatment of fantasies of consumption in *Sexing the Cherry*, particularly where they involve the consumption of male flesh by the "larger than life" woman. Towards the beginning of the narrative Dogwoman describes her first sight of a banana as:-

...nothing more than the private parts of an Oriental...'It's either painted or infected,' said I... Johnson shouted '...IT IS TO BE PEELED AND EATEN.' At this there was unanimous retching. There was no good woman could put that up to her mouth, and for a man it was the practice of cannibals. (SC,5-6)

A series of amusing episodes are related by the female characters of this text vis-a-vis their various sexual encounters with men who proffer themselves as the embodiment of anatomical excess, only to find themselves swallowed whole:-

...[The man] unbuttoned himself to show a thing much like a pea pod. 'Touch it and it will grow,' he assured me. I did so, and indeed it did grow to look more like a cucumber... 'Put it in your mouth...as you would a delicious thing to eat.' I like to broaden my mind when I can and I did as he suggested, swallowing it up entirely and biting it off with a snap. As I did so my eager fellow increased his swooning to the point of fainting away, and I...disgusted by the leathery thing filling up my mouth spat out what I had not eaten and gave it to one of my dogs. (SC,40-41)

Just as the use of food imagery links oral pleasure with the desire to consume, so engulfment of the male by mouth or vagina transforms penetrative pleasure into the desire to destroy:-

'I'd like to swallow you.'
'Adventurous, eh?' he said. Whole, I meant, every single bit, straight down the throat like an oyster, your feet last...
(SC,145)

Similarly in Swan's text, from the "stubby little organ" (p.33) possessed by the dwarf Hubert Belcourt to the "small nub of purple [which bobs] from the centre of Martin's enormous frame" (p.209), the consistently diminutive or inconsequential dimensions of male sexual organs fictionalise terrorised patriarchal fantasies about the consumption of the phallus by women of all kinds in their guise as "colossal cunt[s]" (p.51).

But in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* fantasies of consumption do not always privilege the central character. Dreaming that she has the power to make Ingalls grow to a gigantic height way beyond her own, she travels in his pocket towards Gretna Green:-

Just past Manchester, I grew out of his pocket...by the time we reached Carlisle I was a head bigger than he. In Dumfries, he came up to my belly button. In Gretna Green, he was thigh high and the minister wouldn't marry me to a man who was disappearing before my eyes. (BMW, 235-6)

What begins as an apparent vision of Anna as an empowering influence upon Ingalls turns out to be a fantastic vision of her ability to consume him wholesale. Rather than rejoicing in this power as does Dogwoman, Anna clearly perceives it as a slur upon her femininity. Clear links are made throughout Swan's text between consumption and the denial of femininity, links which work to marginalise rather than empower Anna with her own spirit of transgression. Masculinist fears about her sexual appetite have already been addressed; but accompanying these is a profound disquiet about her appetite for food, which Bates considers to be:-

...too big for a woman...[I] don't think an animal's clapper is proper food for a female. To see her chew these parts of the body with relish upset my digestion." (BMW, 173)

Both the quantity and nature of the food consumed conspire against passivity here. The swallowing of another's tongue symbolically functions both as a desire to silence the Other and as a refusal to swallow one's own. But elsewhere Anna's relationship with gluttonous excess seems more problematic. Taking part in an eating contest with a group of other "curiosities", although Anna competes with enthusiasm, it is interesting to notice that the whole Rabelaisian scene is interspersed with references to Anna's awareness of how this impinges upon her "femininity". Initially she removes her

belt, a gesture which might suggest a willingness to throw off societal constraints and pleasure in excess. However, the surreptitiousness of her gesture, combined with the fact that she qualifies her enthusiasm by noting: "Luckily, I remained slim because I was tall" (p.76) deny the otherwise carnivalesque possibilities of her involvement. Her table-manners are also worthy of attention. In contrast to the general scene of frenzy brought about by the rest of the group:-

Not a mouthful [being] savoured, not a dish
praised...the noise was horrific. Jane
swore...Nutt choked and complained...Bihin
and Colonel Goshen breathed loudly...
(BMW,77)

when the group as a whole have given up and only Anna and Ingalls are left in the contest, we read that "Suddenly all was quiet" (p.77). For Anna, non-conformity to the feminine ideal is only ever partial, as demonstrated by the fact that she is eventually prevented from winning the contest through asphyxiation by a literal trapping of femininity: her corset.

Fears surrounding Anna's role as consumer take a subordinate role to her ultimate nightmare, however, which involves the consumption of her own body, a fantasy to which she is subjected on more than one occasion:-

...we posed on the front porch of our giant
home...As the camera clicked, I drooped and
dipped below Martin until Apollo was a yard
higher and the top of my red head was level
with Thumb's ear. The curiosities shook with
uncontrollable laughter while I stared into
the lens of the camera like a dead woman.
(BMW,311-2)

Snuffed out by the camera shutter, this fantasy emerges out of what she believes to be a literal anatomical reduction. An obsession with measurement and statistics in this text consistently conspires against Anna's ability to "let herself go" (a phrase which encapsulates the duplicitous nature of the beauty industry, a woman who "lets herself go" being encouraged to believe she is free to enjoy herself only at the expense of her physical attractiveness). At this point in the narrative Ingalls tries to persuade Anna that she is shrinking by means of a series of fraudulent measuring sessions. Torn between wanting to aspire to the "feminine ideal" which will please Ingalls, and yet fearful of losing her "larger than life" status, Anna is placed in a similar position to that huge body of women³⁶ who are coerced into strict dietary regimes by their male partners in an attempt to *help* them "reduce" (as American English so blatantly refers to the notion of dieting).

One could argue that an obsessive desire to slim finds its extreme manifestation in the desire to become invisible. Fantasy fiction has long explored the concept of invisibility as an empowering phenomenon, but for women it is more often than not associated with absence and powerlessness. Lizzie, turning to a clearly diminished Fevvers in the final section of *Nights At The Circus* tells her:-

You're fading away, as if it was only always nothing but the discipline of the audience that kept you in trim. (NC,280)

The Exhibiting of Absence: Display and Dismay

Paradoxically, in dealing with the overbearing presence of the "larger than life" woman, invisibility and display are central preoccupations in all of these texts. As we have seen, for Anna Swan in particular the notion of display is early on associated with humiliation and shame, thus counterbalancing any fantastic powers she may possess. On her first day at school she finds herself forced, through a mortified realisation of the power of the gaze, to reduce and diminish, apologising for her own existence:-

...before shame clamped shut my mouth, I
heard myself say: "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
FRIENDS AND PASSERS-BY: Forgive me. My body
is showing." (BMW,24)

Coerced into a denial of self, the use of the passive form here emphasises her loss of control over how she is perceived. Significantly, the continuation of this passage incorporates the first application of the term "freak" to Anna, demonstrating without any doubt that the label is inseparable from the concept of scopophilia and display. Throughout the text, Anna is objectified and humiliated by the gaze. Often this happens unawares, but at other times the voyeur is quite blatant in his/her intentions and Anna has no choice but to conform. Perhaps most disturbing of all, we are made aware that women as much as men delight in reducing her through the gaze. Lavinia Warren (herself a midget and thus an exhibit) admits that she prefers "to watch excess than to commit it" (p.77), a statement that simultaneously illustrates her desire to take up the stance of the "normal" and her willingness to inflict derision upon

others in her position. But it is Queen Victoria, another diminutive woman who, in a blatantly exploitative manner, violates Anna in a way that transcends any of the male characters' assaults upon her body:-

"Miss Swan, this is to please me - not humiliate you," she said. ...Then [the menservants] advanced towards me...[and] pried under my gown and now lifted the hoop of my crinolene high...now I was revealed as the brazen female I knew myself, in my heart of hearts, to be...Victoria cried out: 'God save you, my dear child!' Then she ducked her spiked head and walked in a slow and leisurely fashion through my legs. *En passant*, she paused to study the archway of my poor pelvis and my long legs trembled at the thought of her solemn little face regarding my enormously baggy drawers which consisted of two separate sections gathered at the waist and open at the crotch.
(BMW, 195-6)

Despite Victoria's exclamation, which could be read positively as the latter recognising Anna's regal stature, thus suggesting that one "larger than life" female is paying homage to the legendary features of another; in effect Anna is as prostituted by this act of enforced display as any other. In this context Victoria's initial disclaimer becomes irrelevant; the pleasure of looking does not reduce the power to humiliate - far from it.

Although fearing invisibility through shrinkage, Anna's position with regard to display seems little more positive, being based upon tolerance rather than willed desire. In contrast to this, *Sweet Death* offers a more positivist approach. The narrative opens with the central protagonist sitting alone in a darkened cinema, an opening suggestive of solitariness and a desire for concealment and invisibility. However, although indeed desiring solitude, her retreat from

public view is immediately countered by her emergence into broad daylight, parading her physical presence before the people queuing for the next showing. From this moment onwards, the emphasis is always on presence rather than absence, so that when the well-intentioned male student who attempts to befriend her asks: "Why are you hiding?" she can answer in all honesty: "On the contrary, I'm making an exhibition of myself" (p.50). As with the aforementioned eponymous blank page of Susan Gubar's essay, the protagonist of Tardat's novel appears to be absent because in transgressing the established conventions of aesthetics, she simultaneously transgresses the established conventions of cultural interactive practices. Her solipsistic existence, however, reflects on her status as embodiment of her own erotic fantasy. Her claim that she is "making an exhibition of [her]self" seems a strange one as far as vernacular usage of the phrase is concerned, but on a literal level she has become her own aesthetic object. From this perspective the ritualised positioning of the mirror between her legs to reflect her genitalia reinforces this. In an interesting parallel to Dinesen's story this act becomes a displaying of absence³⁷.

Outside the private realm, invisibility mirrors the way in which others, both strangers and otherwise, fail to perceive her presence. On confronting a street photographer and demanding he acknowledge her aesthetic existence, she notes:-

He was trembling with embarrassment ...the proof that people pay more attention to me than they let on. (SD,99)

The empowering dynamics of this situation, provided by her ability to deny this state of publically-acknowledged invisibility are not, however, reflected by her reaction to her own mother's attitude. Separately boarding the same plane, she describes herself as:-

A terrorist armed only with pounds of fat, I threaten the other passengers with my excess weight. They all look at me suspiciously, except for that very stylish and lovely woman smiling through the cabin window... (SD,97)

Just as we ponder the power relations implicit in whether Fevvers is "fact or fiction", similar ponderance accompanies the distinction to be drawn between whether Tardat's protagonist is a terrorist or a freedom fighter in this context. In striving to transcend the limits of accepted normality this woman hopes for a fantastic liberation from conformity. Her bravado, however, falls flat in the face of maternal neglect. Perhaps this explains more fully the motives behind her wilful display of her own body before another calm and stylishly aloof woman she encounters, this time (of all places) in an art gallery:-

...[she] is contemplating *La Danse a Bougival*...But here I come, brutally squashing her pleasure...Stepping in front of the picture, I force her to consider my well-developed posterior...I can guess her thoughts! After all, we can't keep the infirm, the sick, and the monstrous from having access to art, can we?...In my own way, am I not also a masterpiece? (SD,63-4)

In forcing this woman to confront her own disturbance at having her comfortable aesthetic judgements problematised by the protagonist's presence, she is glorying in this effect which she is powerless to have over her own mother. However,

the wording of the passage demonstrates that this remains solely at the level of fantasy for the protagonist. She has no empirical validation of her belief that she succeeds.

Sexing the Cherry seems to offer a rather more empowering strategy on the relationship between invisibility and display. Winterson's notion of being "larger than life" exists as a mental, as much as a physical concept. Nicholas Jordan's mother recalls:-

...I wasn't fat because I was greedy; I hardly ate at all. I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me...It seems obvious, doesn't it, that someone who is ignored and overlooked will expand to the point where they have to be noticed, even if the noticing is fear and disgust. (SC, 141)

At first sight this seems remarkably similar to the treatment of wilful display exhibited in *Sweet Death*. The difference lies, however, in the transgressive aspect. Tardat's protagonist may transgress the established limits of aesthetics, and indeed feeds into Bakhtinian transgressive notions of excess through the narrative compulsion with the opening up of the body to the consumption of sweets. Winterson's, however, transgresses through the fantastic. Irrespective of her size, there are several references to an invisibility which is empowering, in contrast to the enforced invisibility projected onto Tardat's protagonist by the embarrassment of those around her. At the start of the text, following the crone into the night, Dogwoman notes:-

I was invisible then. I, who must turn sideways through any door, can melt into the night as easily as a thin thing that sings in the choir at church. (SC,8)

Undoubtedly accompanying the realist aspect of merging into darkness along secluded alleyways, there is an attendant suggestion here that the paranormal presence of the crone shields her with an invisibility which is in keeping with her transgressive abilities elsewhere in the text; abilities which Jordan perceives in genuinely "larger than life" terms when his statement: "God is bigger, like my mother, easier to find" (p.116), demonstrates the transcendent potential with which she is endowed. But the story told by the tenth dancing princess reminds us that invisibility is not necessarily a physical phenomenon:-

[My husband] was courteous and polite; he enjoyed being at home, but in the fantasy of his home I was not the one who sat opposite him... Day by day I felt myself disappearing. For my husband I was no longer a reality... (SC,58)

Just as the princess learns the paradoxical lesson that, in leaving her husband, absence can diffuse the power of invisibility, so the larger concerns of this fantastic text demonstrate that women's presence as empowerment need not be beholden to acknowledgement by the masculine gaze. So we encounter the story of her sister, Fortunata, whose presence defies gazes and limitations of all kinds:-

On her wedding day...she flew from the altar like a bird from a snare and walked a tightrope between the steeple of the church and the mast of a ship weighing anchor in the bay. (SC,61)

In a narrative packed full of alter-egos Fortunata can be considered the most important textual double to Dogwoman. At first this seems an outlandish claim, considering that Fortunata is as evanescent as Dogwoman is corpulent, but of course Fortunata's "larger than life" qualities are two-fold. Firstly, as shown above, she has the ability to transcend the structures and preconceptions of reality which all of these "larger than life" protagonists share. Secondly, she is "larger than life" in her legendary status. Fortunata even defies the enclosures of the text. Never physically present within the narrative, Fortunata exists solely as a mythic creation in the mouths of other characters. As a personification of Winterson's overall approach to the relationship between fantasy and reality she is also central:-

The self is not contained in any moment or any place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once. (SC,87)

Though transcendent in the context of Winterson's novel, this positioning of the self within a world simultaneously within and outside of time and space can be applied to the dangerously abject function of the mirror which, in catapulting the borderline figure of the "larger than life" woman into a realm which lies between the self and the not-self, locates her "On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me"³⁸.

In *Sweet Death* the image of the mirror is employed on both a literal and metaphorical level, and consistently

functions as a distorting plane refracting asymmetrical images. On occasions the asymmetry reflects well on the central character as when, faced by a woman who operates as her magnifying mirror (being even larger in size) she recognises her as:-

...my passive double...resigned to her lard...so ashamed of being different from everyone else. And there I am...slightly jealous of her size. (SD,13)

The asymmetrical nature of this reflection derives less from the imbalance in physical proportions and more from the disparity in attitude held by the two women. Unlike the protagonist, this woman has fallen foul to social pressures which transform the physical power of female size into a source of social shame³⁹. But the most celebratory example of asymmetrical mirroring occurs, not between herself and a near physical rival but, at the opposite end of the spectrum, between herself and a child encountered on a bus journey. Sharing in the pure carnivalesque pleasures of bodily excess:-

We pummeled our cheeks, puffed out as far as they would go...she was funny. Myself grotesque. But I know it. And this experience gave me a certain feeling of euphoria...A child's laughter is often contagious. But a monster who dares to have fun - that's inconvenient...that freezes laughter into a grimace on the lips. (SD,51-2)

Elsewhere, however, the asymmetry offers less in the way of unequivocal empowerment. Sitting with the friendly student in a cake shop, the protagonist glances into the mirror beside them, noting the incongruity of their pairing which she labels "Handsome and the Beast" (pp.53-4). The mirror

has dual application to this scene. Although she is assigning a label to the image reflected in the glass surface, she is also making an implied comparison between herself and the student as de-formed versions of each other. The concept of coupling implies an asymmetrical balance between the two partners: "asymmetrical" in this context because, of course, patriarchal preconceptions of heterosexual relationships favour the belief that the male should be larger (and thus physically more powerful) than the female. Similar asymmetrical versions of the self are offered in the scene in which she and her mother face each other in a tiny hotel room:-

Our cramped quarters forced us into a physical proximity we hadn't experienced in ages. She sat in the worn leather armchair, while I more leaned than sat on the edge of the bed. My swollen feet grazed the gleaming stilleto heel of her shoe. (SD,91)

The almost mirroring of postures here sets up the asymmetry once again. Just as the asymmetry of the previous scene derives in part from the perceived disjuncture between the sizes of the protagonist and the student, so here a similar disjuncture emanates from the protagonist's incredulity that flesh of her size could ever have emerged from the diminutive flesh of her own mother.

When framed by the mirror in her isolation, the protagonist's sense of self is equally negative. Reference has been made above to the central protagonist's ritualistic examinations of her vagina in the mirror and the manner in which it recedes into folds of flesh as her body gains in

weight. In a parallel scene to this, she places a mirror on her writing desk, and examines her face in it, noting that:-

The flesh...is being dragged down by its own weight. My cheeks fall in a flaccid mass...My eyes are disappearing into grayish-mauve swellings...Nothing left but two humid brown slits...My lips are pendulous, fleshy, greedy wads... Soon my cheeks will meet in the middle to form two clumsy buttocks...
(SD,64)

Again we notice the dual application of the mirror, the literal mirror being in itself mirrored by the face and genital region as asymmetrical distortions of each other. References to "cheeks", "slits", "lips", and the explicit comparison with buttocks emphasise the connection between these two bodily parts. As she systematically explodes the limits of her body, distinctions between anatomical regions becomes blurred. In swallowing up her eyes and nose, this woman's flesh will ultimately blind and suffocate itself.

Although such asymmetrical mirrorings demonstrate the hostility which epitomises the mirror's function in this text, the protagonist still relies on it as a marker of her self-destructive "success". Simultaneously like and unlike Fevvers, Tardat's protagonist prides herself on the reflection she sees there, and consuming the provisions she has stacked up before her mirror in the final push towards death, comments:-

I rather missed seeing my face. Here it is again, the face of a fathead, getting paler and paler. I'll see my body in a few days.
(SD,120)

At the same time wavering between display and dismay, elsewhere she admits:-

Every day I'm startled by my own reflection:
this deformed monster is me. And I wonder if
the most monstrous thing in all this might
not be the look I give the monster. (SD,124)

The tragedy of this passage resides in the self-alienation it conveys. Characterised once again by asymmetry, the disparity between the gaze and its reflection confronts her with the horror of her act far more than any unmediated vision of her own flesh ever could, the final stage in the process involving the mirror she turns in upon herself. Towards the end of the narrative her recognition that "I've still got the skeleton of a child" (p.122) demonstrates the manner in which her outer casing has come adrift from her inner frame, the two surfaces of the glass being rent asunder by the asymmetrical tensions inbetween.

A similar technique of setting up characters as distorted mirror images is to be found in Swan's text, where repeated attempts to oppress the "larger than life" woman take place, once again, by mirroring her as the eternal child. Jane Campbell, as fat as Anna is tall, functions in the text as the distorted mirror image of Anna's "larger than life" self. Gilbert and Gubar have emphasised the role played by the patriarchal magic mirror in setting up rivalries between such figures, however⁴⁰, and while Anna may claim:-

...I was Rabelaisian in my giant core - and
only adopted a staid manner later as a way of
becoming normal (BMW,115)

she reacts to Jane's own carnivalesque eroticism by proclaiming it that of a "noisy, fleshy lump" (p.76). Nevertheless, in their costumes and performances (Anna

wearing "...a short cambric frock and ribboned bonnet and roll[ing] a nine-foot hoop" (p.94) and Jane wearing "...a child's dress of plum-coloured muslin" (p.101) and ballet slippers) the two are clearly mirrored versions of each other and, outside of their own magic lenses are doubly reduced by the larger mirror of the public gaze into the role of little girl.

Throughout the text, female rivalry holds up the distorting lens of this magic mirror which cuts the "larger than life" woman well and truly down to size and Frannie Bideman's presence in the text operates in precisely this manner. Described by Anna as a "child-bride" (p.263), Frannie plays the little girl in such a way as to reduce not only herself but Anna too. Visiting Anna with a group of the local women, Frannie takes advantage of Anna's temporary disappearance outside in order to dress up in Anna's stage costumes, much in the way that a child dresses up in her mother's clothing. Rather than emulating Anna through this mirroring act, however, Frannie's motives derive from a desire to mock her "larger than life" counterpart. Thus Anna, looking through the glass into the house, finds the window transformed into a cruelly distorted mirror, and herself transformed into one of Noel Carroll's or Kayser's monstrous hybrid forms in two ways. The first of these takes place through Frannie mirroring her appearance "...as she held the garment with its stiff, bulbous bosoms about her like a wooden barrel" (p.281). The second resides within her own proximity to Frankenstein's "larger than life" monster, standing at the window on Victor's wedding night, shut out and excluded.

As far as Fevvers is concerned, the mirror is both her slave and her master. Fevvers' dressing-room is in itself a veritable hall of mirrors and, at her peak, we see her colluding with the mirror, her ally and flatterer, in the creation of her own splendour:-

She cast a glance at the opulence reflected in the mirror, admired her own bosoms. In the auditorium they demanded her. (NC,180)

We have seen that the recurrence of the mirror symbol in fantastic fiction generally prioritises the duplicity of the latter's surface dimensions. Whilst posing as a direct reflection on reality, the point is, of course, that it constructs a forged image which merely resembles our interpretation of that reality. But the surface of the looking-glass, while on the one hand pushing us back into reality, simultaneously attempts to draw us into the not-world which so many fantasy texts explore. Once again, therefore, the fantastic leaves us teetering on the edge. Jenijoy La Belle notes that:-

For many men, the mirror takes on significance...only when it becomes a magic glass, a sign of something beyond the visible world⁴¹ (my emphasis)

a position that seems to resemble Walser's relationship with the mirroring capacities of Fevvers' eyes:-

[He] felt the strangest sensation, as if these eyes of the aerialiste were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds...he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an unknown threshold. (NC,30)

In this context of course, the implied demand for truth involved in looking Fevvers "in the eye", is inevitably frustrated because no one version of the truth is any more valid than another in this text. So Walser, rather than immersing himself fully, teeters on the edge of a pool of unknown depth and width, afraid to plunge in head-first but unable to retreat having passed, like Buffo, the point of no return.

For women, of course, linked as it is to the related concepts of physical appearance, objectification and the aging process, the proximity of the mirror is always perilous, precisely because of this power to threaten on both sides of the glass. La Belle claims that "...women who totally identify with their reflections frequently find themselves endangered"⁴², not because they fall into a fantasy void but because:-

The mirror image represents an otherness - an other-ing or splitting of self - that can become a form of insanity...⁴³

Fevvers, progressively alienated from her adulatory audience, becomes increasingly unsettled by the mirrored self with which she completely identifies. In contrast to Walser's disturbance towards the beginning of the text, by the end the power relations are reversed. Looking at her image as reflected in the distorted mirror of Walser's eyes:-

She felt her outlines waver...For one moment, just one moment, Fevvers suffered the worst crisis of her life: 'Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or am I what he thinks I am? (NC,290)

Rodolphe Gasché's work on reflection is of significance here. Drawing an etymological comparison between cognitive reflection and optical reflection he argues that only through "self-reflection" can the subject acquire a sense of wholeness. The passage quoted above combines both understandings of the term "reflection", but the connection between them initially seems to contradict Gasché's stance. Fevvers' philosophical questioning of the nature of her own existence undoubtedly derives from the fact that, at this stage of the narrative, Walser fails to see her as anything but a conglomeration of disparate images and phrases. Lacking in such empirical validation of her own unity, Fevvers' own reflections also lead to a recognition of the self as fragmentary and diffuse. The problem for Fevvers, however, emerges from the fact that, prior to this self-referential passage and in keeping with La Belle's earlier point, her consistent dependency upon the mirror has denied her a sense of "original unity" from which fragmentation and doubling can draw. As Gasché notes:-

...the limits of reflection are rooted in its neglecting to recognize that, logically speaking, doubling, separation, and dissolution are meaningful only with respect to a totality. The metaphysics of reflection... presupposes an original unity within which the fragmenting and antithetical power of understanding can become effective.⁴⁴

In *Sexing the Cherry*, on the other hand, the "doubling, separation, and dissolution" to be found in the narrative structure through the use of character doubles and the mirroring of time periods, does derive from an "original unity", that unity being embodied in the figure of Dogwoman

herself. The presence of the mirror in this text is metaphysical rather than literal, the most obvious example concerning Jordan, who is brought face to face with his double Nicholas Jordan at the end of the text (p.166). That mirroring remains at one remove from the levels of literalism perhaps implies that no mirror could reflect the powerful image of Dogwoman whose physicality is, as has been said, only one facet of a transcendent strength which falls between visibility and absence.

The most obvious character double for Dogwoman in this text is Nicholas Jordan's mother, who is depicted as living in 1990, in contrast to Dogwoman's Seventeenth Century existence. Unlike Dogwoman her contemporary equivalent is not immense in physical stature, but speaking of past physical excess, she comments that:-

When the weight had gone I found out something strange: that the weight persisted in my mind. I had an 'alter-ego' who was huge and powerful...whenever I called on her I felt my muscles swell and laughter fill up my throat. (SC, 141-2)

In ironic contrast to the obsessive and nightmarish fantasy of the anorexic, whose bloated reflection still confronts the skeletal form before the mirror as a haunting omnipresence, Dogwoman as alter-ego is immense in power and liberating in her physical excess. But it is this ability to transgress biologically determined limits that enables her to function as a figure of fantastic empowerment in this text. In all cases what we recognise is that the borderline function performed by mirrors in these texts in itself reflects the stance of the protagonists involved. Taking up

their position, which is both in front of (and thus outside of) and within the looking-glass world, the women themselves inhabit that marginal positioning where reality and unreality meet.

A Fantastic Woman or Simply a Freak?

Recognising the borderline status of the "larger than life" woman, whose transgressive relationship with established structures necessitates a movement out of realism and into the fantastic, the relationship between transgression and empowerment is worthy of consideration. It has already been noted that transgression is not, in itself, intrinsically empowering. Nevertheless, Wills raises the possibility that feminist fiction, being more directly concerned with the relationship between text and society might be privileged in having:-

...a more productive relationship with carnival, leading to a closer connection between literary transgression and cultural transformation.⁴⁵

Certainly when coupled with the disruptive possibilities of the fantastic, one might hope such to be the case. In *Sweet Death*, however, as the punning title suggests, pleasures of the flesh propel the protagonist straight towards a self-willed destruction. Albeit that death is a welcome release from the pain of maternal neglect, and that the protagonist has control over her own destiny, this overall objective can only problematise any reading of the text as empowering. We have noted that her fantastic pleasures usually emerge from

the auto-erotic, but on occasions her fantasies are purely related to her desire for death:-

Apocalyptic vision of my corpse baking on a beach in the South Seas ...[sailors] split open my belly with one thrust of a sharp harpoon. My sugary entrails writhed on the sand...No turtle would want to feed any of it to its offspring. As it slowly bleaches under the tropical sun, my carcass acquires the architectural consistency of meringue... (SD,109)

Such pleasures as exist here derive from vengeance, as the continuation of the passage makes clear:-

...my skin ballooning and exploding in midair, with shreds like tattered pancakes fluttering in slow motion down onto the faces of Mama and her friends, where they stick fast. Panic...They're suffocating, their stifled nostrils finally inhale scraps of my skin...My poisoned flesh, of woman born, flesh of her flesh. (SD,109)

If revenge depends upon self-destruction, its sweetness must surely leave a bitter taste in the mouth. By the end of the narrative both auto-eroticism and the pleasures of orality have left her behind. Planning to end this "tasteless farce" (p.21) (a phrase in itself encapsulating the bland with the grotesque), Tardat's protagonist arranges a fake marriage in which her flesh will be consummated by itself. Taking place behind closed doors, the devouring of the cake is an end in itself, rather than merely a precursor to the "real" consummation of the wedding night. Divorced from any resonance of fertility or renewal, her nuptial act welcomes, not "a new life together", but a death alone. Chernin has argued that:-

The food obsessions of contemporary women are a deadly serious affair precisely because of the imperative need for female transformation expressed through them...⁴⁶

Although an exploration of the physically transformative potential of "a deadly serious affair" with food, the content of Tardat's narrative merely replicates the tragedy of the woman as "hungry self"⁴⁷. But it is not only in *Sweet Death* that this theme is dealt with, despite this being the most obviously self-destructive example. Repeatedly we are alerted to chinks in these protagonists' armour, chinks which reduce their empowering potential as fantastic figures.

On the subject of food and its influence upon the transformative self, it was observed in the previous chapter that fruit and vegetable imagery is used in *The Birth Machine* to stimulate nightmarish fears of the woman's body in rebellion against the self. It is interesting to note with regard to empowerment, that in Swan's text there is a similar recurrence of vegetable imagery, and a similar association with anatomical excess, but in this context rebellion takes the form of excessive swelling evoked on the male anatomy by the "larger than life" woman. The vegetable theme is introduced right from the time of Anna's birth which:-

...coincided with a bumper crop... mammoth love-apples, squash as big as wagon wheels, zucchinis as long and as fat as men's thighs, and potatoes the size of faces. (BMW,9)

Her association with fantastic embodiments of fertility in the form of the excessive growth of vegetable tissue,

instils a belief in her from her earliest days that she is empowered to evoke growth in others. Most notably it is Ingalls who benefits most fully from Anna's largesse, the most striking example of this occurring when Anna, present in the company of Barnum and Ingalls, fantasises that:-

Ingalls' bandy legs were lengthening and curling in vine fashion - twice around the legs of his chair...I couldn't keep my eyes off his square trunk which had burgeoned into a massive zucchini that rose until his top hat split open like a seed pod...[Barnum's] head looked to be the size of a Prince Edward Island spud...I looked away to avoid giggling at his pasty potato face and glimpsed in the glass bell-jar a vast, skirted Maritime Squash nestling coyly against a stubby zucchini. (BMW, 111-2)

It is important to note that the zucchini and potato references found at the start of the narrative are repeated here, this in itself being suggestive of unconscious associations. Recognising and acknowledging that the metamorphic elements of this scene are displaced references to her own sexual desires for Ingalls and dislike for Barnum, the empowering effect they have on others is clear, but to what extent they genuinely benefit Anna remains unclear. Such imagery is common in the explicit fantasy sequences, although the displacement process involved in translating her desires into vegetable form gradually fades into the background until Anna's power to evoke growth in Ingalls finds literal expression in the rather more mundane ability to transform Ingalls' penis to erectile proportions, an "ability" upon which repeated emphasis is placed.

Such powers for growth as Anna has seem consistently dependent upon others' recognition of them for validation,

and at times of low esteem she concedes that she "...could not make [normals] grow or Poppa's vegetables either - no matter what I did" (p.35). Towards the end of the text her association with vegetable symbolism seems more likely to oppress than to empower her. Turning to Ingalls for validation of her strengths her enquiry whether he:-

...thought she was unhinged because she was beginning to see people here as vegetables that needed to grow (BMW,218)

is more likely to associate her with the pejorative connotations of the cabbage than to offer her genuine potential for empowerment. This treatment of vegetable symbolism sets the pattern more generally for her relationship with empowerment elsewhere in the text. A series of incidents occur in which apparently empowering situations are undercut by attempts at reductionism by a variety of characters who, as noted above, in their respective ways attempt to cut Anna "down to size". Not the least of these resides in the perpetual and seemingly unproblematic labelling of "giantess" inflicted upon Anna throughout the text. Such terminology in itself, though posing as a celebratory recognition of her legendary qualities, encapsulates a duplicity which emanates from the fact that the empowering potential of the lexical stem is immediately undercut by the appendage of the reductive female suffix.

What hope there is for Anna as a fully transgressive figure perhaps depends, in line with Wills' approach, upon her stance regarding the carnival scene. Her above-mentioned reference to herself as a Rabelaisian would, in keeping with

her function as circus performer, anticipate her ease with the carnivalesque in contrast to Bates, who despite his avowed preference for "the brilliant, the exotic, and the spectacular, a category to which giants belong..." (p.118) is shown to be, if anything, a dampener upon the proceedings:-

...he was off, marching past the awe-struck street performers...The street acrobats, wearing spangled shorts, stopped somersaulting and tossing coloured balls; children stopped whacking badminton cocks; and the barrel organ of an old showman...was silent. (BMW,231)

Pitching their stall amid the "Bearded miners and dandies...ranchers' wives and girls with bare shoulders" (p.317) it becomes clear that this libertine atmosphere is familiar territory. If Bakhtin is to be believed, then Anna's very position within the festival crowd endows her with transgressive potential. Stallybrass and White, however, have offered an important challenge to this unproblematic perception. Summarising Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalesque as:-

...a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled.

they note that underlying the superficial spirit of gay abandon is a far less progressive ethos. Whilst aiming a blow at the established order:-

...carnival often violently abuses and demonizes weaker, not stronger, social groups - women, ethnic and religious minorities...⁴⁸

Earlier on in the narrative as fire engulfs the American Museum, the surrounding throng embody a collective manifestation of pure carnivalesque pleasure:-

...screaming for tastes of "boiled whale" and "fried snake"... speculat[ing as] merry-makers on how high the kangaroo would leap to avoid the flames or if Jocko, the monkey, felt the fire was more aggravating than being fed fake nuts, or whether the owl and the white cat sang "a doleful harmony" as the flames filled their cage. (BMW,142)

But trapped inside and fearing for their lives, Anna and her fellow curiosities are far from liberated by the anarchic setting. As Stallybrass and White note, when the powerless wield power they do so over those less fortunate than themselves.

Similar duplicity surrounds Anna's status as an embodiment in herself of anatomical excess. Once again taking a Rabelaisian view, Anna's physique alone should be enough to empower her with celebratory potential; and indeed on occasions such potential seems evident. On arriving in Seville she is taken by surprise by a menstrual flood, the flow being sufficient to provoke fears of a haemorrhage. Nursed back to health by the local women, she is told that:-

Some of them confessed to Cora that their menses arrived the day after mine...because I am so big, I may have caused all the women in Seville to spill over together with the blood of creation! (BMW,272)

The positive terminology employed in this passage implies self-recognition on Anna's part of her subversive abilities to endow excess upon the women around her. In true Bakhtinian celebratory style, "the body" in this context is

not merely individualised, but comprises a "large body" of women joining together in collective anatomical excess. But theorists such as Wolf remind us that women's bodily empowerment, particularly when collectivised, is perceived as a particularly threatening phenomenon by patriarchy, and one which must be prevented by turning the body of women against itself through obsessive dieting and female competition for male approval, both of which blight the women concerned. The latter has already been mentioned, but the former is worth further attention. Although uninterested in dieting, Anna is seduced by Ingalls' hypocrisy into believing that, through the power of a shrinking potion, she and women like her can "reduce" in order to win greater male approval. Coerced into advertising the potion she finds that:-

...a yelling mob surged towards me ...women of all shapes and sizes... Why did they want to shrink when they would look so nice big?...I, who had defeated gravity for 32 years and who took pride in every inch of me, I had been as gullible as any thrill-seeking customer... (BMW,318)

Sadly, only through a recognition of her sisters' misplaced enthusiasm does Anna finally retrieve her own self-esteem. In the series of assaults made upon Anna's body it is interesting that her sexual organs are set apart as the primary source of fascination (and attempted appropriation) by the male characters. From Belcourt's transgressive insertion of the phallic substitute at the beginning of the narrative through to Doctors Beech and Robinson's argument about their precise dimensions at the end, she is never free from their attempts to delimit her boundless excess. When

Belcourt's already-noted exclamation labels her a "colossal cunt" (p.51) her personification as an over-sized genital projects onto Anna all the shame that has been heaped upon women and their pride in their bodies down the centuries.

In contrast to this no such anxieties plague the "larger than life" male figures in the text, all of whom concur that size equates positively with assertive manliness. Although McAskill is considered "a legend up where he came from" (p.149) no such compliment is paid to Anna, this despite the fact that her story does incorporate the occasional outburst of heroics:-

...[I] picked Thumb up by the back of his trousers...and the midget's nasty little mouth opened and closed hard on my palm, drawing blood. I shook him onto the top of the woodstove. The midget squealed in pain...reluctantly, I lifted Thumb up with both hands and dropped him into the barrel of water used to fill his foot-warmer. Then I sailed majestically from the room...
(BMW,108)

But it is in her desire to play by male rules that Anna's subversive potential is intrinsically limited. In the contest for aspirations of gigantism, Anna's willingness to be measured seems as often as not simply another manifestation of her desire for male approval. Unlike Fevvers (whose relationship with the humbug adds to both her mystique and her legendary potential), and unlike Dogwoman (whose swashbuckling size actually plays and beats the patriarch at his own game), Anna seems too concerned to prove herself in the masculinist stakes to be able to transcend or subvert them. Early on in the text she notes that patriarchal incredulity that a woman could attain her

size leads to a series of assaults upon her clothing in order to verify her sex. Her later complicity with such verification processes merely validates their masculinist aims.

Inevitably, therefore, one wonders to what extent the "larger than life" woman can be a figure of empowerment. Ricarda Schmidt⁴⁹ has made claims for Fevvers as the embodiment of "The New Woman", hope of the twentieth century and inspiration to us all. There is some evidence for such a claim. Fevvers' power is undoubtedly at its peak in Part I of the novel, where the combination of Fevvers and Lizzie works very effectively as a double act via which Walser becomes completely disorientated as they unquestionably get the better of him and his wits. Their outlandish stories of Fevvers' past adventures along with a touch of Lizzie's "household magic" and Fevvers' own enigmatic appearance serve so to frustrate Walser's journalistic curiosity and determination to "get to the bottom" of the situation once and for all that, as they talk on and as "obvious lies" are mixed with tall tales and verifiable facts, though:-

He continued to take notes in a mechanical fashion...he felt more and more like a kitten tangling up in a ball of wool it had never intended to unravel in the first place.
(NC, 40)

While in Fevvers' dressing-room Walser is completely at the mercy of the two of them and, as we have seen, this sense of irreconcilable mystery is at the root of both our delight in Fevvers as a protagonist and her success as a fantastic creation. But as Palmer has recognised⁵⁰, though "celebratory and utopian elements" are to be found in this

text, they are simultaneously undercut by a "demythologising" process which is not entirely complimentary to Fevvers. There are, in keeping with the other protagonists dealt with in this chapter, many examples of a physical empowerment deriving from her anatomical excess; but importantly, and like Anna Swan in particular, Fevvers is diminished in physical stature as the narrative progresses, becoming increasingly tarnished and dishevelled, her dark hair roots exposed and her wings broken and bedraggled:-

...every day, the tropic bird looked more and more like the London sparrow as which it had started out in life, as if a spell were unravelling. (NC,271)

The paradoxical dilemma for Fevvers and Anna in particular is that, whilst marginalised as "freaks" and "abnormalities" in their stage act personas, they literally cannot afford to become "normalised". As Lizzie succinctly tells Fevvers:-

...the baker can't make a loaf out of your privates, duckie, and that's all you'd have to offer him in exchange for a crust if nature hadn't made you the kind of spectacle people pay good money to see. (NC,185)

And it is in this context that, despite Palmer's claims to the contrary⁵¹, the mannequin symbolism so central to texts such as *The Magic Toyshop* re-emerges in *Nights At The Circus*. Trapped by market forces, in common with the *Sleeping Beauty* and *Mignon*, Fevvers' status at times is at least partly dependent upon her proximity to the lifeless:-

That morning, the newspapers carry an anonymous letter which claims that Fevvers is not a woman at all but a cunningly constructed automaton made up of whalebone, india-rubber and springs. The Colonel beams with pleasure...at the way the box-office tills will clang... (NC,147)

a proximity which also places her in much the same position as Tardat's protagonist. Whilst one could argue that her act colludes in the exploitation of a gullible public, she is thoroughly exploited in her turn (and with far more damaging possibilities) by that very same public. But as well as her "larger than life" status impinging upon her vitality, it also offers a challenge to her status as a woman. Schmidt argues that: "As her nickname, the Cockney Venus, already suggests, Fevvers is, beyond doubt, a woman"⁵². But this seems a misguided perspective for two reasons. Firstly, as already stated, if Fevvers has any power at all it depends upon the perpetuation of doubt, not its resolution. But secondly, and more significantly, the paradoxical reduction which exists within her nickname is that in imposing upon herself the status of goddess, her recognition of herself as a flesh-and-blood woman must inevitably be compromised. In common with all stage and screen goddesses she becomes less than, not more than a woman. Fevvers' sense of her own gender identity seems precarious at the best of times, not least because her awareness of herself as a *fantastic* woman paradoxically depends entirely upon her reflection in the eyes of men; firstly through their depraved or licentious fantasies, and secondly because (as for Anna Swan) part of Walser's scepticism and fascination for her body derives from him pondering "Is she really a man?" (p.35). Schmidt argues that:-

[Though she] needs to see herself mirrored in the eyes of the others ...the miraculous Fevvers is the inventor of her own singularity for which she seeks acclaim.⁵³

But in exclaiming: "Pity the New Woman if she turns out to be as easily demolished as me" (p.273) Fevvers' words convey an acknowledgement that her role as "inventor of her own singularity", far from endowing her with the empowering title "New Woman", actually runs the risk of robbing her of any womanly status whatsoever. As Walser acknowledges: "As a symbolic woman, she has meaning, as an anomaly, none..." (p.161). Despite her efforts to transcend realist limitations Fevvers' situation is simply that of so many female performers. Defined by their bodies, and set up as icons, goddesses and/or sex-symbols, they lose their humanity in the process of attaining a stardom which is really a freakdom.

By the end of the novel, Fevvers' reliance upon masculine approval is most acute. Once again Schmidt argues that:-

In Walser's reflections several aspects of a new symbol of woman are named...First, the new symbol must show woman as part of humanity, not raise her above it or below it. Second, it must ensure that woman does not have the status of an object but of a subject...⁵⁴

Leaving aside the problematic idea that Schmidt attributes empowerment to received images framed by the masculine gaze, the two-fold symbolism with which she feels Fevvers to be endowed seems particularly spurious. The first of the two facets has been challenged already, but to go on to suggest that Fevvers has circumvented objectification seems a very

strange conclusion to draw from the text. Stranded in Siberia far from the "larger than life" construction kit comprising her make-up, mirrors, and audience, Fevvers clearly craves objectification:-

The young American it was who kept the whole story of the old Fevvers in his notebooks; she longed for him to tell her she was true. She longed to see herself reflected in all her remembered splendour in his grey eyes.
(NC,273)

While the "larger than life" woman eschews the real in preference for the fantastic, reduction craves truth as a necessity. No longer the instigator of wilful deception, Fevvers falls victim to it. Through her (mis)adventure in the wilderness, in true fantasy tradition, Fevvers wakes up to a frightening world on *this* side of the looking-glass. Her dreams of fantastic empowerment are over. While Carter gives Fevvers the final say:-

To think I really fooled you!...It just goes to show there's nothing like confidence.
(NC,295)

the final revelation, once all other mysteries are resolved, concerns: not her disputed authenticity as a "winged biped"; nor the validity of her tall-tales; nor the truth about Lizzie's manipulation of time. The final deception is the myth of her unadulterated virginity, from which all else seems to take up its position on the spectrum between truth and falsehood. Few endings could have left us with as clear an example of definition and delimitation of the woman through her body as Carter's.

Of all these "larger than life" figures, only Dogwoman is genuinely transgressive and empowering. Some challenge to empowerment is nevertheless offered, and where this is the case it takes a very similar form to that found in the other texts. Both Dogwoman and her 1990s double, for example, are perceived by the dominant culture as monstrous freaks, a judgement which impinges upon Dogwoman's personal life in the form of the terror, bewilderment and at times repugnance she evokes in any potential male lovers. But although her recognition that no man is a match for her need not in itself qualify empowerment, her acknowledgment that "I have no vanity but I would enjoy the consolation of a lover's face" (p.39) does foreground the absence of a fulfilling relationship with a female suitor. Perhaps, however, it is Dogwoman's solitary existence that enables her to function inspirationally for us. Unlike Fevvers, freed from the necessity of the search for approval in the reflected gaze, Dogwoman inspires us to look inwards for evidence of our "larger than life" selves. Her attraction as an inspirational source derives, not merely from her pleasure in her own physicality, but also in her celebratory humour. Although several textual examples are provided of women who collectively outwit men through stealth or cunning (attributes which have always been applied to women), those which are most empowering are those involving out and out swashbuckling courage.

Of course the celebratory nature of this inspirational text as far as feminists are concerned, derives at least in part from the fact that the humour frequently strikes a blow at masculinist practices. Although Jordan's perceptions of

his mother include the incurrence upon her of honorary status as "...one of the boys, a back-slapper and a man who knows a joke or two" (SC,114), Dogwoman's jokes are aimed firmly against the patriarchal power-base. Confronted by a group of Cromwell's men trying to requisition her house for their cause, Dogwoman recounts:-

I ran straight at the guards, broke the arms of the first, ruptured the second and gave the third a kick in the head that knocked him out at once...another took his musket and fired me straight in the chest. I fell over, killing the man who was poised behind me, and plucked the musket ball out of my cleavage. I was in a rage then. 'You are no gentleman to spoil a poor woman's dress, and my best dress at that.' (SC,69)

This wonderful parody of all those masculinist wish-fulfilment narratives in which the central male character, surrounded, shot at and attacked from all sides, emerges unscathed without even having to pass a comb through his hair is one of the most liberating scenes for women in contemporary fiction. Unlike Anna Swan, rather than emulating the standards set by patriarchal heroics Dogwoman subverts them through parody; and equally unlike her masculinist equivalent, is salvaged from ridicule by "sending herself up".

But as well as the empowering blows aimed against patriarchal histrionics a series of assaults are made against those men who consider their own bodies to be "larger than life". As in Swan's text vegetable imagery is frequently associated with the male anatomy, usually applied as a metaphorical representation of penile tumescence. But just as over-sized masculine virility is treated as mythical

in both texts, so the vegetable symbolism employed associates the swelling of the penis with fantasies of its engulfment by the woman, as Dogwoman's comic misconceptions make clear:-

In copulation...the member comes away in the great tunnel and creeps into the womb where it splits open ...like a runner bean and deposits a little mannikin to grow in the rich soil. (SC,41)

In *Sexing the Cherry* it is interesting that any "larger-than-life" men receive a very different treatment to Winterson's "fantastic" women, nearly always coming to a sticky end. The eighth dancing princess, telling the story of her excessively obese husband, recalls how he gulps down a draught of poisoned milk, the effect of which is to cause him:-

...to swell up. He swelled out of the house, cracking the roof, and within a few moments had exploded. (SC,55)

Strikingly similar to the later scene (already mentioned) in which Dogwoman's 1990 double fantasises about breaking out of the limitations set up by body and home as a means for liberation, here bodily rebellion, while still liberating the woman from her domestic prison, results in destruction for the male member of the household, just as it does elsewhere for the male member.

But the full transgressive potential of this text is embodied in Dogwoman, not just as "larger than life" inspiration, but as a figure who transcends realist limitations in the conventional manner of the literary

giant. Repeatedly associated with "wide and muddy" (p.32) rivers, Jordan's description of the place of his birth as:-

The shining water and the size of the world...I left my mother on the banks of the black Thames, but in my mind it is always the same place I return to, and that one place not the most beautiful... (SC,11)

is entirely in keeping with an idealised description of a biological birthing which, despite our knowledge that Jordan is a foundling, projects onto Dogwoman The Voice of the Mother, particularly when one considers the resonances it shares with the following:-

There is almost nothing left of the sea but a word without water...But a clarice voice only has to say: the sea, the sea, for my keel to split open, the sea is calling me, sea! calling me, waters!⁵⁵

In the context of Cixous' words Dogwoman becomes the source of a "largesse" associated with the Realm of the Gift, Jordan's watery and mysterious origins being the source of such an outpouring. Just as Cixous would argue that the Voice of the Mother calls to us from across the boundaries set up by the Symbolic Order, so Dogwoman calls to us from across the boundaries of time and place. Her body may not be "the most beautiful" of places, but her empowering potential lies in its transgressive excess.

Textual Dilation and Narrative Excess

In her very interesting discussion of "literary fat ladies" Patricia Parker perceives an intrinsic link between the dilation of the female body and the opening up of discourse in the form of the generation of a text⁵⁶. Elaine

Jordan⁵⁷, also tackling narrative structure, recognises that for the first time in her novels Carter opens up *Nights at the Circus* to a multiplicity of voices and a dislocation of chronologies, perhaps in itself reinforcing Parker's claim that narrative dilation must accompany the dilation of the "larger than life" protagonist. But on the whole, although this is true, it is the three other texts under consideration that have most to offer from the perspective of textual dilation. Parker argues that the act of literary criticism is in itself a process of dilation involving:-

...the 'opening' of a closed text to make it
'increase and multiply' and [transforming]
its brevity into a discourse 'at large'...⁵⁸

But *Sexing the Cherry* requires no such critical intervention to achieve status as a dilated text, because in and of itself, just as Dogwoman's dilated body cannot be constrained within the limits of realism so, once again, we find that the body of the text cannot be constrained within the limitations of narrative closure. Repeatedly opened up to a series of voices, both personal and impersonal, the narrative leaves the reader on several occasions unsure as to the identity of the narrative voice of a particular passage, exploding the concept of narrative autonomy and, as Devon Hodges would note⁵⁹, subverting the conventions of the realist text. In true fantasy style, resistance to linear chronology and the mirroring of temporal dimensions accompanies the general subversion of the limits of preconceived reality, an important manifestation of this being the problematic relationship between truth and origins. Jordan, whose origins are a mystery, compares his

life to a secret letter "...written in milk...squashed between the facts... (p.2). Relying solely upon Dogwoman's testimony as a "fantasist, a liar and a murderer" (p.102) that his childhood happened at all, his mother is also attributed with the role of forger (in both sense of the term) of this existence. The words that Jordan employs, however, project Dogwoman into the form of Cixous' Medusa who, in also writing "...in white ink"⁶⁰, laughs in celebration as, in imposing her own dilated body onto the body of the text, she wreaks havoc upon established convention.

But Parker's claims that, through the concept of dilation, resistance to narrative closure accompanies a resistance to anatomical enclosure also raises the question of whether the form of Swan's and Tardat's narratives offers transgressive possibilities lacking on the level of content. In Swan's text an introduction to the relationship between body and text is provided by the dream sequence already alluded to, in which Barnum and Ingalls metamorphose into vegetable form. Interspersed with this fantastic element is another of even more surrealist proportions:-

Meanwhile the office was filled with giant writing. Vast letters splattered the walls and furniture ...Some - big as babies - sat on our laps to be held. Barnum bounced the word "engaging" on his knee and looked at me curiously... (BMW,111-2)

Remembering that "vast" or capital letters are associated in this text with the reductive naming of the human being as a freak or exhibit, in cosily dandling such lettering within their laps, in truth all three are implicated in bargaining

over Anna for capital gain, as the lexical choice isolated for scrutiny implies. The present participle of the verb "to engage" is one which draws together physical attractiveness and the hiring of labour, depending upon whether it is used as an adjective or a verb. In this respect not only are Anna's responses to Ingalls revealed but also his for her. Whatever his actions may imply, her physical attraction is of use to him only as financial gain. The reader is reminded of this later in the narrative when Anna's mother writes:-

...I know you believe...that a woman should
modify her man. As adverb to adjective and
adjective to noun... (BMW,287)

The ill-fitting relationship between Anna's stature and the use of these linguistic metaphors illustrates that, despite the likes of Ingalls, Anna cannot be restrained by the wording of her body or the wording of her text.

This has genuine implications for empowerment. Although Anna Swan may claim that "My handwriting is the one average thing about me..." (p.82), the fact that *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* is written around a collection of varying testimonials and contradictory accounts, coupled with the fact that her parents' letters are always transcribed by Hubert Belcourt (and thus, it is implied, manipulated accordingly) contradicts this. Just like her body, Anna's text overflows the straightforward preoccupation with narrative credibility set up by the traditional realist form. The implied pun which lies at the centre of Swan's text concerns the identity of the narrator(s) as tellers of tall tales. In other words, compounding the central question of Carter's text, we are asked to consider not only if Anna

is fact or fiction, but if the narrator's stance itself is factual or fictional. Paradoxically, in making claims for her own credibility as a fantasy creation, Anna opens up the narrative with the following claim for truth:-

...I promise to tell all. What really happened to THE BIGGEST MODERN WOMAN OF THE WORLD in a never-before-revealed autobiography which contains testimonials and documents by friends and associates (from their perspective) of a Victorian lady who refused to be inconsequential. (BMW,2)

Leaving aside the problematic claims for autobiography as truth (and the even more problematic claims of the fantastic as autobiography), the irony here is that the documentary evidence perceived to "support" her own story in fact, more often than not, undermines it. The contributors to the conflicting narrative voices here incorporate two distinct groups. On the one hand we encounter supposed testimonials by historical figures such as Charles Dickens who claims that "[Anna] can thank me for making her immortal as 'the particularly tall lady...in my *Sketches by Boz*'" (p.251), an inclusion which is clearly there to provide authentication of Anna's historical existence as a legendary figure. On the other hand we are confronted by conflicting accounts of narrative events given by other fictional characters. Perhaps the greatest irony from this perspective is Ingalls' challenge to Anna's story about the above-mentioned incident regarding Queen Victoria's scopophilic regard of Anna's undergarments. Ingalls later refers to this as "...a fantastical story" and notes that "The giantess exaggerates so I don't put much stock in that tale..." (p.219). The point is, of course, that as the entire narrative is "a

fantastical story" the attempted lack of credibility imposed on a single incident by the application of this label is lost. Indeed (and again paradoxically) the very fact that Ingalls offers a doubting alternative perspective on the incident actually adds to its narrative credibility (particularly as Ingalls is later depicted as a great teller of tall tales himself). In the case of most of the conflicting narrative accounts offered, the reader tends to mistrust the information given because of rivalry already established between Anna and the characters concerned, but confirmation of either version is never really offered.

On the level of structure, dilation is also present. As noted above, the text begins in the first person narrative, Anna posing as the teller of her own tall tale and her body framing its limits. Although foregrounding the inclusion of testimonies by other characters, she maintains autonomy over the main body of the text by projecting herself into the implied role of editor of her material. From this perspective the inclusion of alternative accounts, and the filtering of her parents' words through the pen of Hubert Belcourt (both set up as examples of the diffusing of narrative autonomy) are rendered subordinate to her own words. But while such restriction is superficially present, two important structural devices problematise and challenge this singular stance. In all four of these narratives a challenge to linear chronology is offered as a means of linking anatomical transgression with temporal transgression. Anna's sister Janette's claim that: "In a hundred years nobody will know [Anna's] name" (p.61) is challenged, both by the reader's own experience of reading

the text, and by the presence, at the beginning of the narrative, of the anonymous "spiel" dated 1977, suggestive of the voice of a museum curator, who summarises for the benefit of twentieth century visitors the "larger than life" (legendary) story of Anna Swan. Coming right at the beginning of the text the positioning of the spiel dilates the narrative limits from within and alerts the reader to the fact that rebellion exists within this "larger than life" text in just the same way as it exists within the body of the developing child whose story we have embarked upon. But a further structural problem is raised by the Epilogue, which is written through the voices of seven of the characters who have contributed to Anna's story, and are left to give their testimonies outside the limits of Anna's body of words after her own death. Resistance to closure is doubly emphasised by the way in which these not only contradict events framed by Anna, but also the testimonies offered by other characters within the Epilogue itself⁶¹. Although Anna's own power to control may be reduced by this technique, the "larger than life" quality of the narrative itself (mirroring the "larger than life" quality of its central protagonist's body) achieves transgressive status through resisting containment within the unproblematic boundaries set up to differentiate between truth and falsity or the real and the fantastic.

In *Sweet Death* a series of self-conscious references are made to the writing process which are couched in a discourse that renders explicit this problematic link between the fantastic body and the fantastic text. The links between form and content in both Swan's and Tardat's text

seem to suggest that genuine "larger than life" status transcends the body through writing the body. Within Tardat's text, the protagonist writes her body in the form of a journal, referring to it at the start of the text as "Nothing but innocuous facts recorded from day to day, the pretense of a life" (p.7). In truth, however, the significance of the act of textual composition lies in its tracing of anatomical decomposition, and in doing so briefly returns us to the aesthetics of invisibility and display. As well as subjecting herself to a series of anatomical examinations, the protagonist frequently watches herself inscribe herself as the subject of her own text. In this case the writing itself is perceived in terms of oral gratification. She refers to the ink as a "syrupy flow of licorice" (p.35) and ink blots on the floor as "licorice jellybeans" (p.36). The nib of her pen becomes a "Tiny beetle tipsy on liqueur" (p.72) and the words themselves are "succulent...thick and oily" (p.36). In contrast to the aesthetics of the grotesque within which her visions of bodies are couched, the aesthetic conventions used to describe her writing are far more positivist. Mourning having broken the nib of her fountain pen, she considers it:-

Sad, this shrunken style of writing, such a contrast to the thick, well-rounded loops and curves of the preceding pages. Today, my writing doesn't look like me. (SD,35)

Here voluptuousness replaces obesity and the curvaceous replaces the bloated, as if writing the body provides a positive alternative version of the self. To this end the precise nature of her equipment is crucial to the effect,

and her promise to herself of a new pen with a "deeply cleft nib" (p.35) seems once again reminiscent of a sensuously fecund cleavage, as opposed to the hideous travesties of the breast mentioned above. In this respect there is perhaps an implied challenge to Gilbert and Gubar's concept of the pen as a metaphorical penis⁶² as the writing process seems, rather than reducing her through the gaze, to put her back in touch with herself. The ritualisation of the writing process through the usage of mirrors, stylish nibs, glossy inks, and beautifully formed letters seems, once again, to emerge out of her childhood past, but operates positively in its connections with Zohra and her capacity for storytelling. Reminding herself how Zohra "...settled herself comfortably on her chair again, her legs wide apart under a mass of colorful skirts..." (p.68), the importance of the bodily stance as a mirror to the open text and its dilation through narrative is made clear. Moving back to the present the protagonist refers to her diary as:-

The perfect friend...completely unflappable...Spreads its blank page out every day with the greatest generosity and perfect impartiality... (SD,104)

The parallels between the two passages are apparent, bodily and textual gestures both conveying a largesse denied her in any other form. When combined with the reference to the "blank page" (once more suggestive of the empowering implications embodied in Gubar's essay), genuine subversion of her desperate reality through textual creativity seems possible.

The protagonist's insistence on the closure of her body through a determined perpetuation of her virginal state, is also challenged by this drive to write the body. Parker argues that:-

One of the chief concerns of the tradition that portrays women as unflappable talkers is how to master or contain such feminine mouthing...[which] is not only in this misogynist tradition the representative of the infuriating opposite of silence but... inseparable from the vice opposed to the corresponding virtue of Chastity, as both are ranged against Obedience.⁶³

From this perspective Tardat's employment of the term "unflappable" in the above-mentioned passage is also of significance. Reminding ourselves of Wolf's recognition that the passion evoked by the expansive woman's body is tantamount to "an obsession with female obedience", we recognise once again that what we have in Tardat's text is an exploration of the threat of the expansive text as a denial of female chastity. Just as the dangerous harriidan is prevented from expressing herself through her unrestrained body, so the dangerous female fantasist must be prevented from expressing herself through the unrestrained body of her text:-

The supposed copiousness of the female tongue...has its textual counterpart in the danger of losing the thread of a discourse and never being able to finish what was begun...⁶⁴

Importantly, while the orderly structure of the protagonist's journal poses as a way in which the fear of "losing the thread" (as for Omayya) can be kept in check, towards the end of the narrative the asymmetrical mirroring

produced by the construction of the text as deconstruction of the body starts, like Barfoot's, to shift and cracks, gaps and fissures emerge within the narrative structure, in this case bringing text and body into line. Coercing herself to:-

...give up this drivel...shut up, go to
sleep, useless pen, pack up your ridiculous
words, off to bed, death should be
lucid and (SD,73)

in omitting the final word of her body's sentence she anticipates the end of the novel, which drops off into "thin" air. Unfortunately, however, the deeply unsatisfying cliché: "My eyes are growing dim" (p.130) with which we are left, although reminding us that bodily overspill must be mirrored by a resistance to narrative closure, actually mirrors the lack of empowerment offered by the content. Rather than transcending limits it fails to reach them and, once again, potential power results in residual disappointment.

Conclusion

Despite the awareness of the "larger than life" physical stature of these fantastic characters, what all of these narratives demonstrate is that physicality, in itself, can never be fully transgressive. Winterson, in philosophical mode, reminds us that our bodies "have a natural decay span, they are one-use-only units that crumble around us" (p.100), even Dogwoman recognising that:-

...rotting is a common experience. We all shall, even myself, though I imagine it will take a worm of some endeavour to make any impression. (SC,118)

In contrast to this, the transgressive nature of these texts emanates, less from the inspirational nature of their protagonists' forms and more from their refusal to comply, by means of the fantastic, with the established form of the fantasy text. We have seen that, generally speaking, a journey into the realms of fantasy concludes with a consoling return to the world of the real, a return which ensures that fantasy is contained within safe textual parameters and that our journey is now safely over. But for women (fantastic or otherwise), such a return would be not only a disappointment but a betrayal. Dogwoman's double, referring to her previously enlarged self, notes that once that self had disappeared as a physical manifestation she remained as:-

...my patron saint, the one I called on when I felt myself dwindling away...Of course it was only a fantasy, at least at the beginning... (SC,142)

Paradoxically, in setting up this distinction between fantasy and "the real", solely in order to challenge that very distinction via the fantastic, Winterson's refusal to impose fixed boundaries re-emphasises the transgressive potential of this borderline phenomenon. It has been argued that, with the exception of *Sexing the Cherry*, the novels under discussion have disappointed on the level of empowerment even though they are all set up as transgressive narratives; but this is not entirely fair. As Elaine Jordan acknowledges: "Angela Carter's scenarios are sceptical but

not pessimistic"⁶⁵. Life on the margins, albeit precarious, need not reduce the "larger than life" woman to the status of either freak or monster. Tribute has been paid above to the skill of both Winterson and Carter as manipulators of the boundaries between the real and the unreal. Oscillation between realms facilitates an overspill beyond the anatomical, and in transcending the limitations set up by the body of her text, the "larger than life" woman flaunts herself before us as a fantastic possibility. Parker argues that:-

Changes in the semiotics of body size are subtly tied to other economies and exigencies of representation, including those linked to the shifting figure of the body politic...⁶⁶

The power of the fantastic lies in the challenge to reality, not in escaping from it. Returning once again to the body as collective, only as a body can women transform their anatomical obsessions into transcendent desires:-

Imagine a generation of women bringing to the work of self-evolution the same devotion...they presently invest in their search for the perfect diet to bring about that ideal body of transformation our generation seeks...Imagine us shaping that new woman, dream of the future...⁶⁷

Although providing varying degrees of inspiration, all four novels embody the potential for transgressive rebellion in the collective body. Only within that borderline territory where the real and the unreal meet do such dangerous and fantastic possibilities exist.

Notes and References

- 1) Angela Carter, *Nights At The Circus* (London: Picador, 1984), p.285
- 2) Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p.91
- 3) *ibid.*, p.92. Indeed it surely significant that Fiedler only addresses the issue of female gigantism in his chapter on "Freaks" later in the book.
- 4) Carter, *op. cit.*; Susan Swan, *The Biggest Modern Woman Of The World* (London: Pandora, 1983); Claude Tardat, *Sweet Death* (London: Pandora, 1989); Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing The Cherry* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989).
- 5) Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), p.153
- 6) *ibid.*, p.157
- 7) Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Woman as Body : Ancient and Contemporary Views" in *Feminist Studies*, 8,1, (1982) 109-31
- 8) See, for example, Robyn Archer and Diana Simmonds *A Star is Torn* (London: Virago, 1986)
- 9) Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) Bakhtin argues that carnival, as opposed to officially sanctioned entertainment "...celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order..." (p.10) and in doing so subverted all established social rankings. Siting the body as the fulcrum of such subversive influence he qualifies the term by using it "...not in a private, egotistical form...but as something universal...not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed." (p.18)
- 10) Ann Jefferson, "Bodymatters : Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes" in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 152-177 (pp.165-6)
- 11) Paulina Palmer, "From 'Coded Mannequin' to Bird Woman: Angela Carter's Magic Flight" in *Women Reading Women's Writing* ed. by Sue Roe (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), 179-205 (p.198)

- 12) Subsequent arguments to Woolf's, including that to be found in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) focus upon the enclosure aspect of the room image, linking it with enclosure of the woman by her own body. Gilbert and Gubar note that: "Literally, women like Dickinson, Bronte, and Rossetti were imprisoned in their homes...In fact, anxieties about space sometimes seem to dominate the literature of both nineteenth-century women and their twentieth-century descendants. (p.83) Taking this further they continue: "...the woman writer who perceives the implications of the house/body equation must unconsciously realise that [it]...does not just 'place' her in a glass coffin, it transforms her into a version of the glass coffin itself" (p.89)
- 13) Wolf, op. cit., p.180.
- 14) Clair Wills, "Upsetting the Public: Carnival, Hysteria and Women's Texts" in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.137
- 15) Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminist Aesthetic?" in *Feminist Aesthetics* ed. by Gisela Ecker (London: Women's Press, 1985), 35-48 (p.47)
- 16) Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.32
- 17) See *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1986) Discussing the differentiation between nakedness and nudity Berger comments "To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself." (p.54) This comparison between two supposedly synonymous concepts demonstrates how, as in this scene from *Sweet Death*, aestheticisation inserts a disjuncture between the real and the image of the real which qualifies and problematises the relationship between the two.
- 18) Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p.37
- 19) Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror : An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p.1
- 20) *ibid*, p.8
- 21) *ibid*, p.69
- 22) Madeleine Gagnon, "Body I", trans. Isabelle de Courtivron in *New French Feminisms* ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), 179-80. First published "Corps I", *La venue à l'écriture*, 10, 18, (1977). Exploring the problematic relationship between the woman writer and the patriarchal literary conventions to which she is

- expected to adhere, Gagnon comments: "Writing meant learning not to spend..." (p.179), spending being suggestive of a feminine pouring forth of language, a spilling out onto the page aside from the sanctioned compartmentalisation and artificial structures of literary discourse.
- 23) See, for example, her chapter on "Sexual Difference" in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 165-77 (p.174)
 - 24) Kayser op. cit. pp.181-3
 - 25) ibid, p.79
 - 26) Kim Chernin, *The Hungry Self : Women, Eating and Identity* (New York: Times Books, 1985), p.56
 - 27) Kristeva, op. cit. p.3
 - 28) Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster" in *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Mark Rose (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976), 116-31 (p.128)
 - 29) Spelman, op. cit. notes that Plato, in associating the physical with women, uses this association to continually devalue both sexes. Men who turn to women for "love of body for body" are thus inferior to those men who turn to other men for "love of soul for soul". Also devaluing homosexual encounters, Spelman considers Plato's negative views of male homosexuality to derive from his belief that, in prioritising the love of the body over the love of the soul "men are acting like women" (p.116).
 - 30) See chapter one of *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* by Leo Bersani (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)
 - 31) Irigaray's notion of "wonder" op. cit. pp.171-2 posits a theory of desire which, rather than seeking to subsume or appropriate the Other, steps back in an appreciation which leaves the Otherness of the Other intact.
 - 32) Luce Irigaray *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.31. First published *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Éditions de Minuit, 1977)
 - 33) As defined in the *Collins English Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1991)
 - 34) Richard Dyer, "Male Sexuality in the Media" in *The Sexuality of Men* ed. by Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries (London: Pluto, 1985), 28-42 (p.35)
 - 35) ibid, p.37

- 36) Wolf op. cit. claims that "Up to a tenth of all young American women, up to a fifth of US women students, are locked into one-woman hunger camps." (p.147)
- 37) In Dinesen's story, a series of royal bed-sheets are displayed, each sheet carrying the bloody stain which represents the "celebratory" loss of a princess' virginity to her husband. Only one sheet remains unstained, displayed among the rest. In this context the presence of the blank sheet superficially reads as a symbol of shame or embarrassed silence. However, as Gubar argues, its very presence offers a subversive stance to conformity "...the result of one woman's defiance" (p.305) which, in displaying absence, clearly functions as a deafening presence. Similarly Tardat's protagonist, in apparently withdrawing from view whilst simultaneously displaying to herself the absence that is her own vagina, transforms two apparent negatives into a positive assertion of self as presence.
- 38) Kristeva, op. cit., p.2
- 39) Wolf op. cit. argues that patriarchy's mass coercion of women into physical reduction is a direct and fearful response to women's increased power through emancipation: "Dieting and thinness began to be female preoccupations when Western women received the vote around 1920...In the regressive 1950s, women's natural fullness could be briefly enjoyed once more because their minds were occupied in domestic seclusion. But when women came en masse into male spheres...women's bodies [were made] into the prisons that their homes no longer were." (p.150)
- 40) Gilbert and Gubar op. cit., p.38
- 41) Jenijoy La Belle, *The Literature of the Looking Glass* (Ithaca: New York, 1988) 169-70.
- 42) *ibid*, p.113
- 43) *ibid*, p.122
- 44) Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.27
- 45) Wills op. cit., p.130
- 46) Chernin op. cit. p.184
- 47) Chernin's thesis argues that women's compulsive eating often derives from a hunger felt at the centre of their beings, instilled by the mother. Tardat's protagonist is clearly a prime example of a woman in the grips of "The Hunger Knot", which Chernin defines in her Preface as an entanglement of "identity, the mother-separation struggle, love, rage, food" (p.xii)

- 48) Peter Stallybrass and Allon White *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986) p.8 and p.19
- 49) Ricarda Schmidt, "The Journey of the Subject in Angela Carter's Fiction" *Textual Practice*, 3, 1, 1989, 56-76
- 50) Palmer op. cit. p.179
- 51) Palmer perceives a clear progression in Carter's writing away from the preoccupations with woman's role as puppet found in early novels such as *The Magic Toyshop*, *Heroes and Villains* and *The Passion of New Eve*; towards the more empowering visions of utopian possibilities offered by later texts such as *Nights at the Circus* and *The Bloody Chamber*. *ibid*, p.180
- 52) Schmidt, op. cit., p.67
- 53) *ibid*, p.72
- 54) *ibid*, p.70
- 55) Hélène Cixous, "L'Approche de Clarice Lispector" extract cited in translation in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* by Toril Moi (London: Methuen, 1985), 115 (first publ. in *Poétique*, 40, 408-19)
- 56) See "Literary Fat Ladies and the Generation of the Text" in *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* by Patricia Parker (London: Methuen, 1987), 8-35
- 57) Elaine Jordan, "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions" in *Plotting Change : Contemporary Women's Fiction* ed. by Linda Anderson (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), 18-40 (p.39)
- 58) Parker op. cit., p.15
- 59) Devon Hodges, "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 2, 2, 1983, 155-64. Hodges argues that the structure of the traditional realist text "necessarily recreates patriarchal culture and ideology" (p.155). In offering a challenge to the unproblematic author/ity of the phallic "I" of the singular narrative stance, Hodges argues that Shelley's text testifies to the "frightful transgression" (p.160) evoked when such conventions are disrupted for the exploration of a specifically female approach to textuality. This seems equally applicable to Winterson's narrative which, like Shelley's "...pushes against the stream of patriarchal culture - interrupting, disturbing, deforming it -encouraging us to see that what seems continuous, inexorable, natural, contains within it other possibilities, other ways of imagining the order of things" (p.163).

- 60) Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *New French Feminisms* ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), 245-264 (p.251) (first publ. "Le rire de la méduse", *L'arc*, (1975), 39-54
- 61) One of the most significant examples of conflicting narratives in this text involves the discrepancy in the accounts of Bates and Lavinia Warren with which the text concludes. Bates makes reference to a "life-size female statue" (p.336) which he has placed over Anna's grave as a monument to her. Lavinia then makes reference to a life-sized statue that she places over Tom Thumb's (Stratton's) grave. Continuing her story with a reference to having visited Anna's grave the latter notes "Then we saw Anna's stone monument. It was smaller than Mr. Stratton's but very nice." (p.340) Only beyond the grave, perhaps, does Bates succeed in cutting Anna down to size.
- 62) Gilbert and Gubar op. cit., p.3. The by now infamous question "Is the pen a metaphorical penis?" with which the authors open their argument, concerns the extent to which the patriarchal basis of literary tradition problematises the relationship between women and the writing process. Tardat's stance seems to offer an interesting challenge to this.
- 63) Parker op. cit., p.26
- 64) *ibid*, p.26
- 65) Jordan op. cit., p.35
- 66) Parker op. cit., p.33
- 67) Chernin op. cit., p.204

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION: THE FANTASTIC ALTERNATIVE TO THE FEMINIST UTOPIA

Penny Florence's extraordinary claim that "Contemporary feminist writers in English do not, on the whole, write fantasy"¹, is one that highlights some of the problems facing the critic interested in gendered readings of fantasy and the fantastic. Surely Florence is incorrect in her statement, not least because it seems that more and more contemporary women writers of fiction utilise a variety of discourses relating to fantasy and the fantastic in their work. What is true, however, is that two main approaches are taken to these discourses by such writers, and it is at this point that the main focus of Florence's article falls into place. In the context of her argument Florence goes on to qualify the above-mentioned statement by differentiating between modes such as feminist sf (the focus of her essay), to which she attributes the exciting qualities of being:-

...a present-future dynamic which doesn't have to be limited by the existing shape of mental constructs - as culturally manifest - in any given society...²

and fantasy writing, which she rather less precisely appears to assign to some free-floating plane in an intangible location with no connection with reality. Under the terms of this assumption one has to agree with her: undeniably contemporary feminist writers do not tend to write the latter. Neither, if it comes to that, does anybody else. The problem, of course, stems from Florence's entirely arbitrary (and surely unsubstantiable) differentiation

between the two modes on the basis of what she refers to as "reality-orientation"³. Having written herself into an unfortunate theoretical strait-jacket, she extricates herself only at the expense of claiming that feminist sf cannot be considered a fantasy discourse⁴. This is an observation which is unhelpful at best and at worst, despite Florence's radical intentions, simply positions her within that reactionary mainstream of genre theory critics whose analyses of fantasy and its related discourses depends entirely upon an obsessive process of classification and counter-classification which may be satisfying for the critic, but does little to open up narratives to readers.

To date, aside from studies of influential individual texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or, more recently, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, the majority of feminist critiques of women's fantasy fiction have, like Florence's, focused upon a genre-oriented study of science fiction and/or feminist utopian writing⁵. Undeniably such fictional texts have and still do exert a powerful influence upon contemporary feminist theory and praxis (fictional and otherwise), and their significance from this perspective should not be under-estimated. It is also quite easy to see why utopian fiction should function as such an attractive preoccupation for feminist writers and critics alike. Celebratory pleasures are far too frequently passed over (by Anglo-American feminist criticism in particular) in favour of a dismal preoccupation with "how terrible life is under patriarchy" and we do not need Roland Barthes to tell us that pleasure is what the reading of fiction is primarily about. But also of course the utopia is traditionally a

politicised form, and the chief attraction feminist utopias hold for feminist critics is their ability to offer an important combination of the pleasurable escapism of conventional fantasy whilst retaining an awareness of (and thus a critique of) existing reality.

But whilst acknowledging and accepting this belief, this thesis has evolved out of a two-fold frustration. The first facet of this has already been stated elsewhere, and derives from a growing sense of disillusionment over the limited extent to which feminist science fiction can be considered genuinely innovatory from the perspective of form as opposed to content⁶. The second has more tentatively accompanied it and derives from a growing sense of irritation with the continued outlandish claims being made by some feminist critics for the transformative potential of utopian narratives beyond the limits of these texts; claims which quite simply cannot be sustained. Florence, for example, links wish-fulfilment with transgression when (but only when) it is given fictional form in the context of feminist sf⁷. She fails, however, to satisfactorily explain why or how feminist sf has come to be singled out for endowment with such exceptional properties. Far from being a transgressive mode, one might argue that feminist utopian fiction does no more than stimulate a perversely Freudian uncompromised desire for what we lack⁸, a characteristic that surely plays neatly into the patriarchs' hands. To reiterate a point made above in the specific context of Barfoot's novel, the relationship between wish-fulfilment and fantasy renders the former inevitably dream-like and consolationist in quality, a characteristic that highlights

the separateness of the "real" and the "unreal", and thus retains the fantasising on a safely distanced level. Thus even where the content of that dream/text is transgressive, the formal limitations of the "closed-system" will always reduce its disruptive impact. The same is surely true of the feminist utopia. Irrespective of the extremity of the vision, at the end of the text we are, after all, simply back where we started, the fixity of the fictional limits merely offering precisely the same type of consolation as the Mills and Boon romance and the same "get-out" clause: we do not have to do anything because fiction does it for us. It is the loose ends, the narrative difficulties and the paradoxes of a text that allow for a fully transgressive reading strategy, and the utopia is of necessity too neat in this respect to more than momentarily offer an extra-textual threat to the real. Lee Cullen Khana observes that utopia:-

...is not, finally, any one place or time,
but the capacity to see afresh - an enlarged,
even transformed vision.⁹

This is an interesting and useful critical definition, and one that helps to open up the utopian beyond the fixity of limits. However, to be fully adaptable to a notion of transgression, the denial of dynamism effected through the use of the perfect tense also needs to be transformed, allowing for the "capacity to see afresh" to be an ongoing and ever-changing process. Foucault claims that "the language in which transgression will find its space...lies almost entirely in the future"¹⁰, a point that seems endorsed by Rachel Blau DuPlessis who, recognising that true transformations require a resistance to narrative closure,

looks towards the discourse of futurism as a means by which textual closure is rendered meaningless:-

Most novels begin in the past and end just at or just before the present with a glance at the future. Hence the present and the future are experienced by the reader as unsullied, static, resolved. But when a novel travels through the present into the future... social or character development can no longer be felt as complete, nor our "space" as readers (beyond the ending) perceived as untrammelled.¹¹

This is an interesting and persuasive point, but surely DuPlessis is conflating narrative time and "real" time in an artificial manner here. Paradoxically, in fictionalising futurism, a writer does not offer the reader an alternative future but an alternative present (all readings taking on a sense of "presentness" as they are experience through the process of journeying through the text). Once again, as with Florence, it seems that DuPlessis' faith in the transformative powers of content alone reduces the impact of her argument.¹²

Clearly therefore for a text to be fully transgressive it must effect innovation through the interaction between content and form, alongside effecting a narrative disturbance through the interaction between reader and text which allows for a transgressive overspill beyond its own limits. Through the disruptive potential of the fantastic, such transgression can be achieved. Of necessity this renders it a problematic and uncomfortable narrative approach. Thus Bersani's claim that:-

Essentially, we would like the world to repeat our fantasies, to give us a satisfaction we have already given ourselves...¹³

can in no way be accommodated into the realms of the fantastic. We have seen that none of the twelve novels discussed in this thesis leaves us with the feeling of unqualified gratification that this implies. Some indeed (particularly those dealt with in Chapter three), may have profoundly unnerved and unsettled us. Unlike the utopia, the fantastic "does not transform the other side of the mirror...into a glittering expanse"; instead it offers us a far greater degree of complexity in which the reflection "is folded back on a questioning of its [own] limits"¹⁴. From this perspective, the structure of each of the three main chapters of this thesis has mirrored the circular preoccupations found in many of the primary works, apparently forging outwards towards a vision of transformative possibility, only to apparently retract into compromise. But in itself this is not a denial of the potential for empowerment inherent within the fantastic, even though no easy answers are offered. Instead it aims to demonstrate how fantastic narratives necessitate an equal readiness towards self-interrogation on the part of the reader. The socio-political dimension that Jackson adds to Todorov's dynamic concept of hesitancy characterises these novels simultaneously as products of and yet narratives struggling against the society out of which they emerge. This circular structure aims to foreground such oscillation.

This prioritisation of struggle is also reflected in the relationship between the theoretical position that has

been adopted in this thesis and that of a great deal of traditional fantasy criticism. None of the texts under discussion here could easily be assimilated into any of the main categories of the fantasy spectrum. Instead each of them, and all twelve collectively, offer a challenge not simply to such classificatory approaches but also, as is hopefully by now clear, to the binary opposition between fantasy and realism itself. To this extent, just as each of the three main chapters of this thesis begins by acknowledging the function of enclosure symbolism in setting up a prohibitive limit that necessarily precedes a transgressive desire to break out, so this thesis in its entirety finds itself rebelling against compartmentalisation, sliding between modes and tightroping along boundary lines. It is of course through Todorov's notion of fantastic hesitancy that a chink of light first emerges, one sufficient to force a rupture in the solidity of imprisoning theoretical constraints. But a slight amendment to Todorov's approach has been necessary for the purposes of this thesis. On the whole, his application of the term depends upon it being a temporary hiatus which will inevitably be resolved on the part of the reader (if, as he allows, not necessarily on the part of the character concerned¹⁵ in order that the reading process might be concluded. But surely these twelve contemporary narratives belie this claim. In the very process of offering a formal resistance to genre classification and narrative closure, they inevitably resist resolution on the level of content and necessarily so, because it is through this ambiguity that we are invited to take up a personal stance in relation

to the multiple readings on offer, a set of choices over which we undoubtedly hesitate and at times may even refuse to firmly decide between. It has been noted above at frequent intervals that the transgressive impact of these novels resides in a disorientation and disturbance evoked through the perpetuation of ambivalence and paradox, resulting in an unfixed positionality on the part of the reader. It is this lack of fixity on all levels that renders the fantastic particularly appealing to contemporary women writers.

If Massey is correct in his assumption that "...in dream we speak our own language, when we wake, the language of others"¹⁶, then the fantastic places us within an uncomfortable borderline territory where discourses clash. None of these narratives has offered us joyous explorations into either *le parler femme* or even *écriture féminine* and yet, perhaps on the borderline zone of the fantastic if anywhere, we find the place where Luce Irigaray's often quoted (and much mistrusted) words come true:-

It is useless, then, to trap women in the exact definition of what they mean ...they are already elsewhere...¹⁷ (my emphasis)

teetering on the edge which both beckons and paralyses us with the fear of the unknown. We have seen that through transgression the limit is always paradoxically reaffirmed, a stance reiterated through Irigaray's acknowledgement of the fact that women's horizons:-

...will never stop expanding; we are always open. Stretching out, never ceasing to unfold ourselves....¹⁸

Jackson's belief in the power of the fantastic to similarly "[open] up...on to disorder, on to...that which is outside dominant value systems"¹⁹ thus clears the ground for a genuinely transgressive fictional exploration of woman's marginality from the "dominant value systems" of society. Following on from Stallybrass and White's assumption²⁰ that the three main sites for cultural transgression lie within readings of: geographical space, psychic forms and the human body, by utilising the discourse of the fantastic in focusing upon women's relationship: with the domestic, with nightmare, and with their own "larger than life" bodies, this thesis has attempted to add a feminist reading to this claim.

Notes and References :-

- 1) Penny Florence, "The Liberation of Utopia or Is Science Fiction the Ideal Contemporary Women's Form" in *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction*, ed. by Linda Anderson (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), 64-83 (p.69)
- 2) *ibid*, p.66
- 3) *ibid*, p.69. Florence's use of this term seems to equate with the recognition of a political consciousness which ensures that feminist "sf" is always in tune with the "real", rather than verging off into what she considers to be the playful escapism which characterises fantasy.
- 4) *ibid*, p.68
- 5) The important exception to this is *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction*, by Natalie Rosinsky (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984). To date this is undoubtedly the most scholarly and thorough publication to resist the genre classification issue from a feminist perspective.
- 6) Lucie Armitt, "Your Word is my Command: the Structures of Language and Power in Women's Science Fiction" in *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction*, ed. by Lucie Armitt (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.123-138
- 7) Florence *op. cit.*, p.78
- 8) This statement is a wilful manipulation of Leo Bersani's belief that "The paradoxical nature of uncompromised desire is that it is simultaneously the experience of a lack and the experience of omnipotence: we yearn for what we don't have in fantasies which provide us with ideal (both perfect and insubstantial) possessions of what we don't have." In *The Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), pp.286-7
- 9) Lee Cullen Khana, "Change and Art in Women's Worlds: Doris Lessing's 'Canopus in Argos: Archives'" in *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers*, ed. by Ruby Rohrich and Elaine Hoffman Baruch (New York: Schocken, 1984), 270-76 (p.273)
- 10) Michel Foucault "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 29-52 (p.33)
- 11) Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "The Feminist Apologues of Lessing, Piercy, and Russ" *Frontiers*, 4, 1, 1979, 1-8, (p.2)

- 12) In fact a closer look at DuPlessis' article demonstrates that the primary works upon which it is based: Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, all resist closure, not so much because of their futurist concerns, but because of other aspects of their respective narrative structures. Thus the characters in Lessing's text, it being one volume of the "Children of Violence" series, are transformed into what DuPlessis refers to as "cluster protagonists" (p.2) who reappear in a number of the individual novels in the series. In this respect an inevitable tension is set up between narrative closure within a single volume and its place as one of many "sub-narratives" within the larger framework of the series. In the case of Piercy's text, although DuPlessis does not pick up on the fact, the narrative actually functions most positively when, in line with Todorov's reading of the fantastic, the reader carries two possible readings in her head simultaneously. The first is that Connie hallucinates the utopian Mattapoissett, rendering the text an exploration of madness; while the second is that Connie really does time-travel to this alternative reality, rendering it a work of science fiction. Full resistance to narrative closure therefore resides in the fact that we are never clear which of these two readings to decide upon, leading us to maintain the possibilities of both, not in its adoption of the device of time-travel alone. Finally, in Russ' text resistance to narrative closure clearly resides in the exciting narrative experimentation that the author adopts, coupled with metafictional interventions which necessitate the reader entering into the play of the text, actively taking on what Barthes would consider to be a "writerly" function in the narrative.
- 13) Bersani, op. cit., p.302
- 14) Foucault, op. cit. p.35 and p.44
- 15) Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p.41
- 16) Irving Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (London: University California Press, 1976), p.30
- 17) Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.29. First published *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Éditions de Minuit, 1977)
- 18) *ibid*, p.213
- 19) Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.4
- 20) Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.2

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